



State of South Carolina  
The Family Court of the Eighth Judicial Circuit

Mindy W. Zimmerman  
Judge

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I am a resident Family Court Judge for the Eighth Judicial Circuit, which includes Laurens, Newberry, Greenwood, and Abbeville Counties in South Carolina, and I was selected to be the designated judge to oversee Safe Baby Court in Laurens County, which was one of the initial pilot counties for this program. We originally started work in 2020 to build our program, and began hearing Safe Baby cases earlier this year.

As a Family Court Judge, I recognize that children who are involved with the child welfare system are more likely to have enduring safety and wellness if the system promotes intentional and individual services for the child's family. Prior to taking the bench, I represented the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) as a contract attorney. I have also represented parents involved in SCDSS cases and served as a Guardian *ad Litem*. From each perspective, I saw how challenging the system was to maneuver. I also witnessed how often the contested nature of these cases created barriers to progress.

I sought my current position because of my interest in helping children, including my desire to assist abused and neglected children move through the Family Court judicial system as quickly and as safely possible. This is particularly important with young children who are the most vulnerable. For this reason, I have been a proud part of this program.

Safe Baby Court is a collaborative effort between attorneys, SCDSS, the Court, and other agencies with a unified goal of developing and implementing processes that promote improved outcomes for children and families. An independent coordinator helps the family decipher the directives they been given so that they can actually complete the services. The parents still do the actual work, but the coordinator helps ensure they have the tools they need to get the job done. I have witnessed participating families become more engaged with their services and work harder to improve the situation for the benefit of their children. The real struggle for me has been visiting other counties, including my home county of Newberry, and observing families who could benefit from the program, if only their county had a Safe Baby Court. I believe our state would greatly benefit from expansion of this program.

Sincerely,

Mindy W. Zimmerman