

Editorial: Another plus for DHS

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The appointment of a medical director for the city's Department of Human Services could be key in preventing tragedies like the case of Danieal Kelly. The 14-year-old girl with cerebral palsy starved to death in 2006 while her family was under DHS supervision.

The city has made a solid choice in tapping Cindy W. Christian, a respected pediatrician and advocate for children, for the newly created medical director position. Christian was director of the Center for Child Protection and Health at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She has also served as a member of the DHS Community Oversight Board.

Beginning her \$100,000-a-year city job earlier this week, Christian acknowledged the challenges that she faces. "Clearly, there is a long way to go," she said.

DHS must not only ensure stable home environments for at-risk children, she said, but also provide routine health screenings. Many children have mental-health issues or suffer from poor health because they don't see a doctor or dentist regularly.

The city's hiring of Christian comes after recent federal legislation requiring states and child-protection agencies like DHS to provide additional support and health-care services. Christian will be working closely with social workers and agency nurses to meet that mandate.

The appointment of Christian also helps fulfill a recommendation from an expert panel that DHS should establish practices to better coordinate health services for children. Nearly 6,000 children are in foster care in the city.

Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose deserves credit for making significant changes since taking over the troubled agency in 2008. But much remains to be done on several fronts to restore public confidence in DHS. Improved oversight at all levels will better ensure the well-being of children under DHS supervision and prevent abuse cases like Danieal's.