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## EDITORIALS

### Getting kids the help they need

*Mental health services have improved in D.C., but more remains to be done.*

**C**ALLING ATTENTION to the need to address the mental health issues of D.C. children was the aim of a report last year by a leading advocacy group. A recently released addendum should press the District government to take further action. The report credits the city with making progress but concludes that there are still significant challenges to be met.

The failure to deal with the mental health consequences of exposure to crime, displacement and other issues associated with poverty can doom other reform efforts, such as initiatives to cut dropout rates or reduce the number of children in the child welfare system. That's why

the nonprofit Children's Law Center says the city should create a quality children's mental health system. Last year it recommended a plan of action; this month it graded the city on its work. The 2013 Children's Mental Health Report Card rated the District as "making progress" in three of seven areas, with two "incomplete" grades and two areas marked as "needs improvement."

What was encouraging was the city's success in laying a foundation for action. It won two federal grants for mental health planning, training and service delivery. Some promising programs have been started, including one that trains day-care staff in how to screen young children for mental health issues and an initiative for trauma-

informed care for children in the foster care system. But problems persist in the timeliness and quality of treatment. The report made clear that much of the city's success will depend on the ability of the District, specifically the Department of Health Care Finance, to provide better oversight of the new managed-care organizations that are contracted to deliver health services to low-income children.

The Children's Law Center has estimated that at least 5,000 District children are going without needed mental health services, with consequences ranging from truancy to crime to unemployment. It's important that the District raise the grade on getting these children the help they require.