

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Tallahassee●com

December 29, 2013

Sunday's letters

Scott and DCF must get it right

Child advocates are watching closely as Gov. Rick Scott weighs candidates and implications surrounding his next choice for secretary of the Department of Children and Families.

For good reason, the post and agency have been among the highest-profile — and most embattled — in the state over the past few years. The facts are heart-wrenching. More than two dozen children known to be at risk or under the watch of DCF have died in the past few years.

The revelation of these tragedies cost the job of most recent secretary, David Wilkins. The agency and its community-based care providers have been sued, with allegations of wrongful death and personal injury, and sexual and physical abuse of kids in their care.

The current interim secretary, Esther Jacobo, was named in July. She has faced admirably the challenges of the post but has said she will leave at the end of the 2014 legislative session.

Gov. Scott must find a suitable candidate to continue the agency's reforms. He already has demonstrated his commitment to and support of Florida's children, as well as those in the DCF system, by naming his wife the chief child advocate.

Like the governor, the candidate should have one over-arching belief: The mission of DCF is to serve at-risk kids and to ensure that the providers paid by the state to care for the state's most vulnerable are held accountable for providing professional services. The kids must come first.

GLORIA W. FLETCHER

Vice President, Florida's Children First

Gainesville

Gloria@gloriafletcherpa.com