



## COORDINATION OF PUBLIC WELFARE ACTIVITIES

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Public welfare in America, like Topsy, has just grown up. Due to this fact, public welfare functions have been added in more or less piecemeal fashion from time to time. There is a complete lack of coordination of public welfare functions, whether federal, state or local.

When the Social Security Act was passed in August, 1935, the United States government at last joined the array of civilized nations of the world that had accepted responsibility for the problems of its people. Prior to that time the federal government was performing relatively few functions of a public welfare nature. Since there was no department of public welfare in our federal government we find the various functions of the federal Social Security Act being divided between several departments or divisions of government. For example, unemployment compensation, old age benefits, old age assistance, aid to the blind and aid to dependent children are administered by the Federal Social Security Board which is independent of any federal department. Furthermore, maternal and child health services, services to crippled children and child welfare services under the federal act are administered by the Children's Bureau which is under the Department of Labor. Also, the extension of public health services is administered by the United States Public Health Service which is under the department of the Treasury. Finally, vocational rehabilitation is administered through the Office of

Education which is in the Department of the Interior. In other words, we find the ten features of the Federal Social Security Act being administered through three federal departments and one autonomous board.

In addition to the Federal Social Security Act there are a number of other public welfare functions being carried on by the federal government, especially the Works Progress Administration. All federal public welfare activities should be coordinated and placed in a federal Department of Public Welfare in charge of a Secretary of Public Welfare who is a regular cabinet officer. Only in this way can we hope to achieve a great degree of efficiency in administration and be assured of a unified program which will not allow individuals or groups not falling definitely within either of the uncoordinated divisions to be neglected entirely.

What has been said of the lack of coordination and unification of public welfare functions on the part of the federal government applies with equal force to the public welfare activities in our own state. All public welfare activities in Oklahoma should be concentrated under the nine-member Public Welfare Commission and administered through the Oklahoma Department of Public Welfare. As the matter stands now, we have several uncoordinated state public welfare agencies, some of which have dual organizations down in the counties. There is no real reason why all direct or general relief cannot be administered under the Public Welfare Commission just as well as old age assistance and aid to dependent children. All institutional administration should also be administered through the nine-member Public Welfare Commission. This is the only way to stop the continuous turn-over of personnel through the influence of political spools that has kept Oklahoma public welfare institutions in a state of turmoil since statehood. The personnel in all penal and correctional institutions, state orphans' homes and state training schools for delinquents should be appointed by the nine-member Public Welfare Commission. In the counties there should be a greater degree of coordination of effort. Instead of having two independent organizations administering the social security program and the general relief there should be only one such agency in each county. This agency, in turn, should be responsible to the nine-member Public Welfare Commission.

A word remains to be said concerning financial administration. The practice of the federal government matching state and local funds is sound. The federal government should never furnish any funds for any state program where the state is not called upon to match those funds. For the most part this type of practice is being followed throughout the United States. There is, however, the exception of W. P. A. In this instance, if the program is to continue, the states and local governments should be compelled to provide at least a part of the money. The chief objection to the financial provisions of the Federal Social Security Act is that it does not require both the state and county to participate financially. The Act only specifies that the state must participate financially. Apparently the only way to keep relief rolls, especially old age assistance grants, down to a reasonable level, where only those who actually need the grants will get on the rolls, is to require that each county shall provide part of the funds through tax assessments. It would even be preferable to have this item printed on each tax payer's receipt. This would tend to eliminate those persons who are able to get old age assistance grants because of political influence. It is realized that in many instances counties would be unable to provide for a great proportion of the funds. I think, however, that they should be required to pay at least 5 per cent of the total spent in each county for each program. There would perhaps need to be a state equalization fund for the poorer counties, somewhat comparable to the weak school fund. Names of counties, however, drawing on this fund should be published so as to keep in check those counties that would

tend to take advantage of the fund. Perhaps the equalization fund would also need to be applied under W. P. A for certain poorer states. Those states, however, who were unable to bear their cost of the W. P. A. program should have that fact made known to the general public through the regular avenues of publicity.

