

STATEMENT OF MRS. HELEN E. BAKER, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE; ACCOMPANIED BY MISS BARBARA MOFFETT, DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

Mrs. BAKER. May I, please? I am testifying on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee, as a member of its board of directors. I also speak on behalf of the Friends Committee on National Legislation. The two organizations speak for themselves and for likeminded Friends.

We appear in support of the general purpose and principles of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. We speak on the basis of our experience.

I speak personally on the basis of strong convictions of my own which have grown out of my experiences with illiterate urban workers in Virginia and North Carolina, in settlement houses in Chicago, with migrant workers in California, with the Prince Edward County relations attempting to rehabilitate or help the morale in a community where the schools have been closed for nearly 5 years, and my present work as an attorney with the Baltimore City Legal Aid Bureau where all of our clients are people who fall within the bracket of the very poor.

For almost 50 years the AFSC has reached out to the poor in many parts of this land and, indeed across the world. Our work in this country has involved us with the people whom the legislation under consideration is designed to help. Our work has shown us the syndrome of poverty: inadequate education; poor jobs or no jobs; poor housing. We have seen these problems combine to create an ever-more-permanent poverty class.

Out of our experience we would like to identify some factors which we feel could spell the difference between success and failure in this attempt to break the circle of poverty.

We would like to emphasize that no program will produce lasting results unless it gains the participation of the poor. This, I should emphasize, should be in the initial stages of planning. To gain the participation of the poor is easier said than done. Few programs do it now; in fact, many are now saying that the people at the bottom of the economic ladder cannot realistically be involved in shaping the programs which affect their business. We believe they can; we will report experience which bears this out.

In stressing this, we do not minimize the need for initiative from other sources. The act appropriately calls for wide involvement in attacking poverty. It seeks to stimulate broad community responsibility for what is a problem of the whole community. We stress participation of the poor themselves because they are most easily ignored and because their exclusion at early stages of planning jeopardizes the success of projects undertaken.

The war on poverty must operate on the democratic assumption that all people, given the necessary facilitating resources of skilled personnel and funds, can plan effectively for their future. The administrators of the program should be prepared to enforce standards of participation reflecting this commitment.