

The National Association of Social Workers which I represent here today is a professional organization with 40,000 members employed in governmental and voluntary health, welfare, and recreational agencies. The association represents a profession which has been historically concerned with the problems of the poor, many of whose members are today the foot soldiers who will and must be called upon to wage what your committee and the President calls the war on poverty.

Our association supports this legislation but, in our testimony, we shall particularly address ourselves to Title V: Family Unity Through Jobs, and Title II: Urban and Rural Community Action Programs, because those titles bear most closely upon areas in which as social workers we have very particular experience.

Viewed historically, H.R. 10440, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, has the promise of becoming the sort of pioneering social legislation that the American concern for the welfare of people periodically produces. We whittle away at problems and then, suddenly, it almost seems, an approach takes shape and a social solution to what we had viewed as a series of separate incidents occurs.

The students of poverty in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, among whom many distinguished social workers were included, occupied themselves intensively with a search for the personal and social causes of poverty.

One statistical table of that period included in addition to drink, immorality, laziness—a “roving disposition” as a factor contributing to poverty. But, gradually over the years we fulfilled in some degree our social obligations to widows and children and the aged who could no longer work as we cautiously moved State by State into programs of mother's assistance and aid to the aged. Then in 1935, we encompassed these concerns into a national program through the Social Security Act. Thus action against the hazards of death or disability of a breadwinner and a loss of income because of age became a matter of an earned right instead of a privilege granted because of need.

Although we have placed a floor of income under an increasingly large proportion of our people through the Social Security Act, through unemployment insurance, through veterans' benefits, through public assistance and through private retirement plans, and although our labor force continues to rise as does annual income, we still have the stubborn and persistent fact that for too many Americans their share of society's goods, services, and benefits, continues year after year to be extremely limited.

PIONEERING EFFORTS OF PUBLIC WELFARE IN PREVENTION OF POVERTY

Over the years, welfare programs—governmental and voluntary—have first sought to alleviate the conditions of poverty. In our urban areas we had societies for improving the condition of the poor while in New England our public bodies were the overseers of the poor. In the last quarter century those of us who had responsibility for administering public welfare programs have sought valiantly to prevent poverty by seeking authority and funds to provide preventive, protective, and rehabilitative services to recipients of public assistance. In 1956 when I was Commissioner of Social Security, the Congress amended the public assistance titles of the Social Security Act to encourage States to provide self-help, self-care, and maintenance of family life services.