

TOWARD IMPROVED RELOCATION

The inadequacies of urban renewal relocation are a measure of the difficulty of the problem, for no program currently provides more generous or comprehensive relocation assistance than urban renewal. Shortcomings that have become apparent in urban renewal experience are probably magnified many times in displacement caused by other public programs. A first step toward improving relocation performance generally would be to standardize the assistance given to displaced people and business firms at least at the level now provided in urban renewal, and public housing.

It may be argued that the goal of improving housing conditions for displaced families is uniquely relevant to the statutory purposes of urban renewal—more so than to other public programs that displace people. Yet to marshal public resources for the sake of providing decent housing for all in renewal and housing programs, while tolerating governmental relocation procedures that retard progress toward the national housing goals, is surely self-defeating. The Commission has concluded that the provision of standard housing for all is a national goal of preeminent importance, and fully justifies requiring that standard housing be available to all those displaced by governmental programs, even if this approach occasionally means postponing progress in some public programs.

Aside from the importance of continued progress toward national housing goals, basic considerations of equity argue strongly for standardizing relocation assistance and payments. President Kennedy thought in these terms in his 1962 transportation message to the Congress, when he recommended extending relocation assistance patterned on urban renewal provisions to the Federal aid highway program and the urban mass transportation program, in order "to move toward equity among the various federally assisted programs causing displacement."

The Federal Government is still a long way from achieving this equity. Congressional action is needed to establish a uniform policy of relocation payments and advisory assistance for people and businesses displaced by direct Federal programs and by Federal grant-in-aid programs. To assure equity under other State and local programs as well, legislation is also needed at the State level to establish a uniform policy covering displacement resulting from State and local programs.

The relationship of adequate relocation to national housing goals, and national concern for equal treatment for all displacees, make improvements in relocation provisions of Federal grant programs a national issue rather than one that may be left to the discretion of States and cities receiving the grants. A local approach to relocation would in fact assure continued inequality of treatment, with each community setting its own standards. Adequate relocation is often considered peripheral to local program goals and consequently tends