

STATEMENT OF HON. LEO McDERMOTT, COMMISSIONER, COUNTY OF CHESTER, PA., ACCOMPANIED BY C. D. WARD, GENERAL COUNSEL, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

Mr. McDERMOTT. I have with me, Mr. Chairman, Dr. Ward, who is general counsel for the National Association of Counties.

I want to thank the chairman of the committee and previous witnesses for making this concession to me so that we may keep our commitments.

I would like to read the statement into the record.

I am Leo McDermott, county commissioner of Chester County, Pa. I am also a member of the Office of Economic Opportunity's Public Officials Advisory Council.

My appearance here today is on behalf of the National Association of Counties, and organization representing the Nation's 3,000 urban, suburban, and rural counties.

Unquestionably, one of the major domestic questions confronting us today is the fate of the war on poverty. It is of the utmost concern to county government.

Today, county governments' largest single budgetary expenditure is that of direct and indirect assistance to the poor. As recently as December 1966 our national association enacted the following basic philosophy with respect to our views on county governments' responsibility in this area:

The National Association of Counties believes the responsibility of alleviating and eliminating poverty is a principal function of county government, and therefore urges the respective states to provide counties with broad legal powers to accomplish such objectives. Additionally, we urge the respective states and the federal government to participate financially in these programs, however, that any accompanying state and federal regulation be such as to maintain the maximum degree of initiative and responsibility at the local level.

County government is very much a part of the war on poverty, and just as the Office of Economic Opportunity has received criticism for their efforts, so have we.

We are here today to offer our suggestions on how, based upon our experience and observation, the Office of Economic Opportunity can be improved; however, at the outset, it should be stressed that we support the continuation of the Office of Economic Opportunity. We do recommend that several basic changes to the program be considered.

First and most basic we feel OEO programs often suffer to a great extent from lack of commitment on the part of a large segment of local government. This is not because of what OEO has attempted but how they are doing it.

We appreciate the fact that the OEO is intended to be the spokesman of the poor and serve as a focal point for the Federal Government's efforts in the war on poverty.

Our suggestions are based upon the assumption that the OEO's purpose in the field of planning and programing is to be one of innovation and evaluation, that once OEO's programs have been tested and proven they should be assimilated into the fabric of our local government where they can receive the coordinative support of the communities' full resources and be integrated with the communities' efforts in the war on poverty.