

APPENDIX 2

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

A REPORT TO GOVERNOR NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER BY THE NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF SOCIAL WELFARE—MAY 1968

Two years ago the State Board of Social Welfare determined to commemorate its 100th anniversary by a search for better answers to today's social problems. The Governor's Conference on Public Welfare at Arden House, in which 100 of the nation's leaders in industry, labor, news media, philanthropic foundations and government participated, was the first step in that search. The effective work done by the Steering Committee of that conference was a second step. The regional conferences held by the Board throughout the State were still another. The hundreds of citizens, agencies, welfare recipients and others who addressed our Board made a further contribution.

The conclusions our Board has reached do not constitute a final response to the challenge. But they are a better response than we had two years ago.

Those answers are stated here as principles subject to continuing study, review and refinement. But they are principles which will chart the course of this Board as it starts the 2nd century of its search for the better society for all the people of this state.

HAS PUBLIC WELFARE FAILED?

It has been repeatedly suggested in recent years that the public welfare system in the United States is inadequate. Such criticisms are valid only if the system is to be judged by whether it has eradicated all the root causes of welfare and dependency. It has not done so. We still have poverty in America. We still have poor education, poor housing, poor health, racial discrimination, unemployment, underemployment, technological displacement, and all the other causes of dependency.

But the welfare system was not intended to solve these problems. It was intended to alleviate the gross effects of poverty—to prevent people from going hungry, from being ill-clothed, from being without shelter. In New York State the system has done this and more—it has provided the social services which have helped many of the poor to achieve self-support and self-care and have strengthened family life. In New York State the basic standard of public assistance—which is, in very real terms, a guaranteed minimum income—is \$3,650 a year for a family of four. This exceeds the commonly accepted national level of poverty. And this state pays the highest grant in the nation for Aid to Dependent Children.

Moreover, we review our standards each year to keep them current. The cost of living in New York City has increased 11% since 1963; our standards have increased 12%.

Nor does New York State have the restrictive or punitive policies that still, unfortunately, exist in many other parts of the nation. There is no durational residence law here, no "man in the house" rule, no unwarranted invasion of the right to privacy of welfare recipients.

Our state system, therefore, is not inadequate if it is judged by what it is intended to do rather than by the hope that it will eliminate poverty and dependency.

Having said this, the State Board of Social Welfare recognizes that a number of improvements should be made promptly in the conduct of the present welfare system. The first part of this report lists such changes.

The Board also recognizes the need for consideration of various proposals that would go far toward changing the system itself. The second part of this report addresses itself to these proposals, most of which require federal rather than state action.