

Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller invited leaders of the economy to a Governor's Conference on Public Welfare at Arden House, Harriman, New York, November 2-3. Eighty-seven participated at the two-day sessions—after having studied especially prepared papers on the basic elements of the problem by prominent authorities—and offered many ideas and proposals. A summary of the recommendations and suggestions made at this pioneering event—prepared by a committee of participants headed by the Conference chairman, Joseph C. Wilson, Chairman of the Board, Xerox Corporation—is included in this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

Another major development was that the Conference recommendations constituted the agenda of an all-day session held by the Committee for Economic Development in New York City on May 8. This organization of 200 distinguished businessmen and educators seeks, through research and discussion, to contribute to the maintenance of the United States economy and living standards at a high level.

The Board followed through on its Arden House program by seeking grass roots opinions on new approaches to public welfare through seven public meetings held in the State. A report on these meetings is also included in this chapter.

Other actions by the Board included adoption of new, major policies and approaches, such as the following:

1. Recasting the whole appeals machinery for recipients and applicants of public assistance by changing that set-up from a conciliation process to a full-fledged administrative review to assure equitable treatment by more effective development, presentation, and evaluation of the facts involved in each appeal, and by permitting the appellant full access to those facts and the help of counsel, or of any other representative designated by him, in the presentation of his case.

The appeals program includes, among other provisions, the right of applicants and recipients to appeal to the State Department of Social Services from decisions of local departments that the recipients or applicants believe are unfair. Such situations include failure of a local department to act on an application for assistance, failure to provide needed assistance, or unfair suspensions or discontinuance of assistance. In the case of appeals against decisions to suspend or discontinue assistance, the Board shortened to 10 working days the time between the request for a State hearing and the actual conduct of that hearing, to protect the applicant family or individual from hardship.

In addition, the Board extended to 170,000 home relief recipients and to all future applicants for such aid the right to make such formal appeal. Heretofore, the appeals process was available only to applicants or recipients of federally-aided public assistance: aid to families with dependent children, and assistance to the aged, blind, or disabled.

2. Requiring that all basic materials on the operation of public welfare programs in the State—federal and State laws, Board rules, and Department regulations bulletins, and other information on official policies—be made available at all Department area offices throughout the State for the information of the public.

3. Endorsing the principle of State administration of social services, instead of the present system of local administration under State supervision, because State administration would further the interests of the welfare recipients and the general public by assuring desirable uniform standards of assistance, operation, and management; by permitting the needed professional development of welfare personnel; and by achieving some simplification by eliminating one level of the present federal-state-local system.

4. Requesting the Legislature to make it clear that Medicaid recipients are not exempt from assignment, income execution, and installment payment orders. (Public assistance recipients are so exempt by federal and State legislation so that their welfare grants are used for food, rent, and other necessities and are not diverted to liquidation of old debts.)

In developing policies, the Board has conducted public hearings, conferred with the State Administration, worked with members of the Legislature, held meetings, with representatives of various citizen, health, welfare and other organizations, met with welfare recipients and their representatives, and otherwise functioned—collectively and individually—as citizen, participant, guide, and policy-maker in the State's social welfare system.

<sup>1</sup> A detailed report on the Arden House sessions appears in the February 1968 issue of *Social Service Outlook*, the Board and Department magazine.