

APPENDIX 5

INNOVATION IN PUBLIC ASSISTANCE: THE CASE OF ELIGIBILITY DECLARATION *

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A. INTRODUCTION

The last eight years have witnessed a sustained and far-reaching criticism of existing public assistance programs. Numerous reform proposals have been advanced, some planned to replace, others to improve the current system. This paper will discuss one major reform which has moved beyond the proposal stage and is already underway in a few jurisdictions. The innovation, "*Declaration*," drastically simplifies and improves the process through which eligibility and grant size are determined. In contrast to current practice, the agency accepts the client's statement (Declaration) about his own status, e.g., age, income, resources, residence, etc. Declaration omits the time-consuming, expensive and demeaning investigation of every relevant aspect of every client's statements. Though originally conceived as a vital reform within public assistance, Declaration provides a revealing glimpse into the problems and prospects for eligibility determination in Negative Income Tax or Guaranteed Minimum Income programs. Eligibility and benefits under these programs must also be based on a determination of income and need. A demonstration that these judgments can be made at an acceptable level of accuracy and with a minimum of administrative cost even at the lowest end of the income scale, will provide strong support for the argument that "universal" income maintenance programs based solely on need can be cheaply and efficiently administered.

The following paper examines the experience to date (March 1968) of the States that have introduced some variation of this innovation. It describes the changes associated with this innovation, benefits and problems encountered, strategies adopted for its introduction and projects a possible direction for the evolution of public assistance. The conclusions are speculative, based upon agency reports and interviews with some of the participants.¹ The paper can be seen as preliminary to a systematic investigation which would include standardized measures of the innovation's scope and impact on such relevant targets as clients, caseworkers, and interest groups in the agency's environment. Such an investigation would test the accuracy of the reported observations about the innovation's impact and the strategy developed for its implementation.

B. HISTORY AND CURRENT USE

Declaration was first used in Public Assistance² in 1962 in Alabama on a project basis and for eligibility redetermination only. It is now in operation or being initiated in all or part of twelve States.³ By the end of 1964, Declaration

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¹I am indebted to the staff of the State public assistance agencies whose programs are discussed below for their assistance in forwarding project reports, copies of forms and manuals, personal correspondence in response to questions and in number of instances, personal interviews. A complete list of these documents is available upon request. Part of the research was carried out while serving as consultant to the Michigan State Department of Social Services, Summer Faculty Demonstration Project, supported by the Bureau of Family Services, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

²A number of States had used declaration in their MAA programs, some went on to use it in the other public assistance categories. See George Hoshino, "Can the Means Test Be 'Simplified'?" *Social Service Review*, 10, 3, (July, 1965), pp. 192-196.

³Date indicates initiation on full scale or experimental basis: 1962, Alabama; 1964, West Virginia; 1965, California, Colorado; 1966, Maine; 1967, Iowa, Louisiana, New York City, Wisconsin; 1968, Pennsylvania, Connecticut; to start July 1, 1968, Michigan, to start "after July 1st, and under active consideration in Maryland, Oregon, Texas and Rhode Island. N.B., for stylistic reasons, I use the term "State" to indicate jurisdiction, though in some States the program is in use in only one or a few subdivisions, e.g., in New York State only two of New York City's 34 centers are involved.