

WELFARE—OUR COSTLY DILEMMA

Inside Welfare: Close-up Of a Staggering Problem

Penetrating Look At Costs, Cases Yielded by News' 6-Month Study

By ED MAY

Every minute your clock ticks, New York State Welfare costs average \$1075.

Each day the relief cash register totals about \$1,547,-945.

And when the calendar reached Dec. 31, 1959, the bill for helping the needy in New York State stood at a single-year record of \$565,000,000.

For three months this writer spent some of that money as a caseworker for the Erie County Department of Social Welfare.

I have given your tax dollars to:

Mr. K., the man whose relief history dates back to 1927.

Baby A., the illegitimate infant of a 14-year-old mother.

Mrs. B., the woman who picked up her emergency food check in a taxicab.

Mr. F., who moved out of an apartment owned by his in-laws because he knew tax dollars don't go to legally responsible relatives.

And Mr. W., the man who has an \$8000 trust fund in a Buffalo bank.

Some Gouging on Rents

I also have given your money to the profiteers of the poor.

To slum landlords whose rents are 100% to 200% above fair profit figures.

And to those who flaunt Buffalo's housing laws in the tangle of tenements that have become weather-worn welfare rows.

But these are the headline-making examples that in the past have brought charges of "sensationalism" from across-the-board welfare defenders.

A series of articles could be written about them alone, but by themselves they would no more explain the multi-faceted problems of welfare than the mere adoption of a residency law would cure them.

A Personnel Shortage

The troubles in being "our brother's keeper" today run the gamut, from the slum where he lives to the university campus where he is studied.

Welfare's difficulties in 25 short years of "big league" existence have developed, in part, from an extreme shortage of qualified personnel.

One of my associates in the Erie County Welfare Department, for example, had 181 cases although the State Welfare Department suggests that 75 are all that can be properly handled.

Today, helping the needy is also bogged down in a paper jungle whose bureaucratic thickets have become so entangled that it took 24 separate form-filled sheets to give a check to my first recipient.

The Bill Is Soaring

And in recent years, particularly, welfare has become a public enemy because all the

What Welfare Means to You

The News today presents the first in a series of articles on one of the most pressing and costly problems of 1960—public welfare.

The problem is not confined to Erie County or the state of New York. It is nationwide and indications are that welfare programs will continue to expand and demand an ever-increasing share of the tax dollar.

For these reasons, The News presents this penetrating look at welfare developed after six months of research involving members of The News staff, its Albany and Washington bureaus, interviews with respected authorities on welfare, and a review of detailed private surveys of New York State welfare agencies.

A reporter also served as a caseworker for the Erie County Department of Social Welfare.

This series does not reflect on the many dedicated individuals who administer the welfare program in Erie County and elsewhere.

It is intended, rather, to direct community thinking toward shortcomings of the welfare system and generate a grass-roots demand that welfare be confined to the needy and dispensed with greater concern for the taxpayer.

taxpayer can see is an ever-increasing stream of dollars to which he contributes.

In Erie County the welfare bill is higher than what it costs to provide a year's education for all of Buffalo's public school children.

It is the front runner among all county expenses and has jumped a whopping \$12,200,000 in the last five years.

In that period, its most expensive item—the Aid to Dependent Children program—has more than doubled. And this category is not directly affected by unemployment.

Three towns in Erie County—Marilla, Concord and Aurora—contribute more money to the county's welfare pocketbook than they put into their own combined town and highway budgets.

\$33.28 Per Capita Cost

For Aurora alone, the adding machine last year tallied a \$144,259.91 welfare figure while the town and highway budget was \$97,674.52.

If you own a house assessed at \$5000, your share of the welfare tab last year was \$36.39—or about 29% of your county tax bill. And that doesn't count the welfare dollars that are spent from your state and federal taxes.

For every man, woman and child, the combined \$29,926,000 spent in Erie County last year on aid to the poor amounts to \$33.28 for each person.

The defenders of the welfare program are quick to jump into the breach here. They say county taxpayers actually hand out only one-third of this money while the rest comes from state and federal coffers.

N. Y. City Gets Most

However, a look at the statistics shows that in New York City 37 in each thousand of population are on relief while the upstate figure is 16.7 persons per thousand.

This means when you're paying your state taxes here you're also footing part of Gotham's welfare tab.

In the federal picture, New York State taxpayers long have bemoaned the fact that their contribution to Uncle Sam's

bankbook has always been greater than their proportionate share of federal aid.

"When they tell you you're only paying one-third of the bill," a critic said, "they tell you to deduct only the money you take out of your right pocket and ignore the cash that comes out of the left."

Beware the Stereotype

It is this ever-increasing pocket-picking that has alarmed everyone from the grocery clerk to the businessman and has put the fear of voting-booth retaliation in the minds of politicians.

It also has created a climate of opinion where John Q. Public sees a chiseler hiding behind every welfare check. To believe that every person receiving aid is a loafer is as wrong as to accept fully the opposite view.

For, as a caseworker I also have given your money to:

Mr. P., an 89-year-old gentleman who long ago mortgaged his house for a second time, exhausted his savings but still insists:

"Don't forget, I'll pay you back when things get better."

Mr. W., nearly 70 years younger than Mr. P., who walked (to save bus fare) almost two miles four times a week to the New York State Employment office "to see if anything is cooking."

Miss S., the woman with an IQ on the 50s who has been certified mentally disabled and now lives at home with her sister instead of in the shadows of a mental institution.

Never Time to Check Back

But the accent in these as well as in my other cases always was on the dollar sign.

When I switched from training assignment to a full caseload I was told:

"The main thing is to get the aid out. You can always check things later if you have suspicions . . ."

But "later" there never was any time.

Many of my relief recipients came to the Welfare Department because they either could not make money or they had been unable to spend it wisely.

For example, one man applied for help after frittering away a \$9000 insurance settlement in seven months.

Symptoms Need Checking

Another had held an \$80-a-week job for a number of years. He had no family, but he could not explain what happened to an unaccounted-for \$2500 a year.

Money is their illness. Public assistance is an attempt to cure it by giving more of the germ.

A family "on the welfare" needs money as much as a car needs gasoline to operate. However, when your car doesn't start in the morning, adding gasoline may not help.

Today there are very few social mechanics in public welfare and their workshops are pitifully undermanned.

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NEXT—Problems of a welfare caseworker.

Welfare Bill Around the State

NEW YORK STATE

Expenditures for all services.....	\$565,000,000
Expend. for state-aided services*	\$465,000,000
Expend. for locally-financed services.....	\$100,000,000
No. of Pub. Assist. recipients (mo. av.).....	518,637

NEW YORK CITY

State-aided expenditures*	\$302,243,000
No. of Pub. Assist. recipients (mo. av.).....	329,136

UPSTATE (OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY)

State-aided expenditures*	\$162,700,000
No. of Pub. Assist. recipients (mo. av.).....	189,501

ERIE COUNTY

Total Welfare Department expenditures.....	\$ 29,926,000
State-aided expenditures*	\$ 27,410,298
No. of Pub. Assist. recipients (mo. av.).....	36,301

* Represents welfare money spent by localities that included state and federal funds.

All figures are for 1959.