

CHAPTER XII

STATE ACTIVITIES IN CHILD PROTECTION

THERE are many persons to-day engaged in child protective work who feel that such work can be done better by the State than by private societies. In 1914 the Secretary of the Pennsylvania S. P. C. C. said at the conference of the American Humane Association held in that year: "This thing that we are doing is, after all, the job of the public authorities. The public ought to protect all citizens, including the children, from cruelty and improper care. As speedily as conditions admit, we should turn over to the public the things we are at present doing."¹ The present secretary of the Massachusetts S. P. C. C. has expressed his opinion that the State should take over the agents, the offices, and the organizations of the child societies and carry out their work. He expects that this will eventually develop in some states. The S. P. C. C.s will then turn to educational work in parenthood, sex hygiene, and recreation, and engage in other activities to raise the standard of family life. In addition, there will always be some specialized case work for them to take charge of.

Mr. C. C. Carstens has pointed out that private societies were necessary in the early development of child protection when the work was experimental, the cases occurring were individual in their application, and elasticity and adaptivity were required of the organization involved. Insofar as any work becomes based on well-established principles, re-

¹*A. H. A., 38th Ann. Rpt. (1914), p. 25.*

quires more permanent care, and involves an element of compulsion or control, it becomes possible for public departments to administer it.¹

The advantages of state administration have been stated: (1) The prestige and power given to the humane officers by state authority, and the cooperation of all legal authorities; (2) the completeness and effectiveness of the work, covering every remote section of the state; (3) the keeping of a permanent record belonging to the state of every child taken by the state; (4) the supplying of sufficient funds by the state to carry on the work without appealing to charity; (5) the avoidance of all conflict between local, city, and county authorities, or societies, in carrying on humane work; (6) the great improvements in methods of humane work resulting from a uniform system, and from the mobilization and organization of all the forces engaged in humane work.²

The state bureaus in Colorado, Minnesota, Montana, Washington and Wyoming, and the Wisconsin State Agent, combine child protection with that of animals. In most cases the emphasis is laid on animal protection. During the biennial period from 1920 to 1922, the Colorado Bureau, which has stated as its policy not to expand either branch of work to the detriment of the other, handled cases involving 1,118 children and 5,183 animals.

In West Virginia, the State Board of Children's Guardians was created in 1919 to take the place of the former Humane Society of the state and to look after the general welfare of the dependent, neglected and homeless normal children of the state. Unlike similar Boards in other states, it is an active prosecuting agency in cases involving cruelty to children and during 1921 and 1922, dealt with 209 such

¹ *Proceedings of the Nat. Con. of Char. & Cor.* (1915), p. 95.

² *A. H. A., 41st Ann. Rpt.* (1917), p. 61.

cases. In its protective activities, it operates similar to the state bureaus already mentioned.¹

Recently in several states, organization for child protection has been developed along county lines. Emphasis has been placed upon the prevention of child dependency and cruelty rather than upon the prosecution of cruelists, with the avowed purpose of preserving the child's own home wherever possible.²

The scope of such work is largely a matter of local expediency. The denser the population, the more opportunity of separating child welfare and adult work. Local resources are also a matter to be considered, and as always, much depends upon the attitude of the executive officer and the adequacy of his assistants. County organization of child welfare has been most highly developed in Minnesota. Here the State Board of Control is the official central agency. It consists of five members, two of whom must be women, with office terms of six years. In 1917 it was authorized to create a children's bureau. This bureau had charge of all fields of child welfare, among others the enforcement of the child-protective laws of the state, and was intended to take the initiative to conserve the interests of children wherever adequate provision had not been already made.

Under its supervision, county boards of child welfare were appointed. By the end of 1921 sixty-nine of the eighty-six counties of the state were so covered. Each county board is composed of from five to seven members, of whom at least two must be women. It is closely affiliated with the

¹*West Virginia State Board of Children's Guardians, 2nd Biennial Rpt. (1922), p. 15.*

²Emma O. Lundberg, "Unifying County Work for Child Care and Protection," in U. S. Dept. of Labor, Children's Bureau Publication No. 107, *County Organization for Child Care and Protection* (Wash., 1922), p. 2.

school system of the county—the county school superintendent is always an ex-officio member. It is expected to cooperate with all the private and semi-public agencies for the benefit of children within its jurisdiction.¹ In addition, the Minnesota Society for the Prevention of Cruelty, a state association supported by state funds, operates throughout the state.

North Carolina is beginning a similar system of county boards. In 1917 the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare was created.² The statute provided for county organization for child welfare similar to that in Minnesota, permissive but not obligatory. No counties adopted the plan. In 1919 it was made compulsory,³ and provision was made for cooperation with a state-wide system of juvenile courts.

The Illinois Childrens Commission in 1921, approving of the Minnesota plan for child welfare, recommended:

In order to crystallize the potentialities of the counties and local communities, both urban and rural, the Department of Public Welfare should promote the formation, by the officials and citizens, of local committees which might be known as county welfare boards. Experience has shown that such boards do much to prevent duplication of effort and to arouse interest, and lead to a common understanding of community resources and responsibilities, and a fine spirit of cooperation in service for the common good.⁴

Child protection would be one of the duties of such county welfare boards.

¹ William W. Hodson, "Organization and Development of County Child-Welfare Boards in Minnesota," in *Children's Bureau Pub. No. 107*, *cit. supra*.

² *N. C. Sess. Laws*, 1917, ch. 170.

³ *N. C. Sess. Laws*, 1919, ch. 46.

⁴ *Illinois Childrens Commission, Report for 1921*, p. 7.

In Alabama the Board of County Welfare movement has developed along different lines. During the past few years, the advisory committees of the county juvenile courts have exercised the functions of county welfare boards. To a limited extent, the work of these advisory committees had been coordinated and given unity by the State Department of Child Welfare organized in 1920, which among other duties, enforced the child labor and child protection laws.¹ Recent legislation has superseded this rudimentary type of county child-welfare organization by providing for a fully developed system of county boards. Each county board is to be appointed by the judge of the county juvenile court upon resolutions to the effect by the board of county commissioners and the county board of education. It is provided that each board shall have the power to appoint an agent or county superintendent of child welfare.²

Pennsylvania has likewise laid the foundation for a system of county welfare boards. The state departments of Health, Labor and Industry, Public Instruction, and Public Welfare have entered into cooperation to further this work. The Commonwealth Committee of six members was organized to serve as a clearing house for public welfare plans. Upon invitation from any responsible group of citizens within a county it undertakes the organization of a county welfare board, whose chairman will be appointed by the Committee.³

Finally, there should be noted the rudimentary county organization which has been sponsored in New York by the department of county agencies of the New York State Charities Aid Association. In 1908 the Dutchess County committee of the Association was organized. A trained

¹ *Alabama Childhood*, vol. i, no. 4, pp. 34, 62.

² *Ala. Sess. Laws*, 1923, no. 369.

³ Lundberg, *loc. cit.*

agent was obtained to undertake welfare work. She found that the protection of the children of the county was an important part of her work. "Unbelievably bad conditions were found in the county, and the most revolting crimes against childhood were discovered." The agent frequently secured evidence and became prosecuting witness in proceedings both to rescue children and to punish adult offenders. In 1917 the Dutchess County committee was constituted by statute the Dutchess County Board of Child Welfare and its activities expanded.¹

This movement for the protection of children through county agencies is still too young for us to judge of its results. The few states that have interested themselves in this field are still experimenting with administrative agencies. Analysis and valid criticism must wait yet a few more years before passing authoritative judgment.

¹H. Ida Curry, "County Organization for Child-Welfare Work in New York State by the New York State Charities Aid Association," in Children's Bureau Pub. no. 107, *cit. supra*.