

The Administration of General Relief in the States During 1940

DOROTHY R. BUCKLIN AND ALDEN J. TESKE*

DURING 1940, persons in need of general relief in the United States received assistance which varied greatly in kind and adequacy, depending upon the State and even the locality in which they sought aid. The diversity in the type and amount of care provided was the inevitable result of the highly decentralized system under which general relief is administered. More than 10,000 local units throughout the country administer the program. State participation in financing or administering general relief is extremely limited or nonexistent in many States. During 1940, in one-fourth of the States, the State government provided no financial support, and in several others the extent of financial participation was very small. In slightly less than one-fourth of the States, the program was administered entirely by the localities without supervision by a State agency. General relief is administered in a substantial number of States by State and local agencies also administering old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind. Even in these States, however, the State agencies as a rule exercise less supervision over general relief than over the three special types of public assistance.

Entire responsibility for the administration of general relief was returned to the States and localities at the beginning of 1936 after a brief period of Federal participation in the program. From May 1933 until the end of 1935 general relief had been financed largely from Federal funds, administered by State emergency relief administrations under the supervision of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. With the inauguration of the Works Program in the second half of 1935, the Federal Government announced its intention of withdrawing from participation in general relief, and final grants-in-aid were determined by December 1935. Employable persons cared for by the State ERA's were to have been employed under the Works Program, and unemployable cases

* Bureau of Public Assistance. Prepared from preliminary tabulations of data relating to January 1940, supplied by State public welfare agencies. More detailed analyses of the data are now in process and will be released by the Social Security Board during 1941.

were turned back to the States and localities. With the withdrawal of Federal financial support, substantial changes occurred in the States in the administration of general relief. In some States the program reverted to the old poor-law basis; in others, the gains in administrative organization made during the FERA period were held, in some measure at least.

Information on certain characteristics of organization for the administration of general relief in the several States¹ is presented in the following discussion and in table 1. Although the data relate to January 1940, they are believed to be substantially correct for the whole year.

Local Administrative Units

In 1940, general relief in the continental United States was administered by more than 10,000 local units, many of which were authorized to determine the existence and extent of need without supervision by a State agency. A few of these local units were branch offices of State agencies; some were county welfare departments or county governing bodies. The great majority, however, were minor civil divisions—cities, villages, and towns—which derive their authority for the administration of general relief from long outmoded poor laws.

Administration by these minor civil divisions was concentrated in 12 States.² In all the New England States except New Hampshire, and in Indiana and New Jersey these minor civil divisions were the only type of local unit responsible for general relief. In Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin a substantial number of county welfare departments also administered general relief; and in some counties of Illinois, the county governing body was the responsible authority.

In the great majority of States—36—the predominant form of organization was a unit with county-wide jurisdiction; i. e., a county department

¹ The District of Columbia is not included in the discussion. A large part of the discussion does not apply to the particular governmental organization in the District.

² Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

of public welfare and/or the county governing body, such as a county board of supervisors. It should be noted, however, that in some States members of the county governing body acted not as a single unit, but as individuals, each of whom administered relief in a specified area within the county.

A county department of public welfare was the only type of local administrative unit in all counties in 14 States,³ and in most counties in 6 additional States.⁴ County departments of public welfare administered general relief in some counties of Georgia and Iowa, and in other counties the county governing body performed this function. Both a county department of public welfare and the county governing body administered the program in a majority of the counties in 4 States—Arkansas, Idaho, Missouri, and New Mexico. In California, a county welfare department in each county provided aid to unemployable cases; branch offices of a State agency, some with county-wide and others with more than county-wide jurisdiction, administered relief to employable cases.

The county governing body was the only type of local general relief organization in South Dakota, and the most common type in 7 other States.⁵ In a few counties in Nevada, a State program for employable cases was administered through the county WPA office concurrently with the county program for unemployable cases administered by the county governing body. In most counties in Oklahoma, a county governing body served both employable and unemployable cases; branch offices of the State Board of Public Welfare administered relief in all counties, but only to unemployable cases.

In the one remaining State, Delaware, the general relief program was administered by the State agency through branch intake offices in two counties and directly by the State agency in the county in which the State office is located.

State Participation in Administration

The degree of State participation in the administration of general relief in 1940 ranged from complete control of the policies and practices of the local units to the exercise of only fiscal controls or intermittent supervision. Where State finan-

cial participation in the general relief program was relatively extensive, State participation in administration tended to be comparatively great. Where there was little or no State financial participation, State supervision was extremely limited or nonexistent. Regardless of the amount of State financial participation, some supervision of general relief by a State agency usually existed if the local agencies administered the special types of public assistance as well as general relief.

A State agency exercised some degree of supervision over all or part of the general relief program in all but 10 States;⁶ none of these 10 States provided State funds for general relief. Broadly speaking, State supervision was most sustained and extensive in the 24 States⁷ in which (1) State funds were provided and (2) branch offices of a State agency or county departments of public welfare administered the program in all or most counties. It should be observed, however, that State supervision did not extend to that part of the program administered by the county governing body in some of these States. Close State supervision was maintained over the branch offices of the State agencies in 2 States, California and Oklahoma, but not over the county welfare departments in California or the county governing body in Oklahoma.

State supervision in the remaining 13 States with some form of local administrative unit was limited in various ways. Only cases lacking legal settlement in a locality fell within the purview of State supervision in Connecticut, Maine, and Massachusetts, whereas in Nevada and Rhode Island only the program for employable cases was State-supervised. Supervision in Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Wisconsin was limited by the fact that not all local units received State funds for general relief and probably also by the multitude of local units to be supervised. In Minnesota, supervision was extended to county departments of public welfare but not to the numerous townships and villages which administered general relief. State supervision was minimal in Indiana and North Carolina, where no State funds were provided, and in Ohio.

³ Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont.

⁴ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

⁵ Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Virginia.

⁶ Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas.

The general relief program was entirely State-administered in Delaware.

Agencies Administering General Relief and Special Types of Public Assistance

In 22 States,⁸ county departments of public welfare administering all or part of the general relief program also administered special types of public assistance, and in all but 3 of these States—California, North Carolina, and Virginia—a single State agency supervised the administration of all programs by the county departments. At the other extreme were 11 States⁹ in which there was no integration of administration at the local level of government. In Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, and Oklahoma, the 4 States in this group which provided some State supervision of the general relief program, there also was no integration at the State level.

The situation fell between these two extremes in the remaining 15 States. In 9,¹⁰ there was integration of administration at the State level and in some or all of the local units. Administration was integrated only at the State level in 2 other States, Maine and Rhode Island. In Florida, Georgia, and Nebraska, where no State supervision was provided, general relief and the special types of public assistance were administered by the same staff in some local units. The executive head of the State old-age assistance agency in Delaware directed a staff engaged only in the administration of general relief.

State and Local Financial Responsibility

Throughout the year 1940, 36 States provided State funds for general relief. In 2 of these States—Arizona and Pennsylvania—no local funds were used. In 19,¹¹ local revenues were provided by the county only; in 10,¹² by both the county and some or all of the minor civil divisions; and in 5,¹³ by minor civil divisions only.

State financial participation in most States was

⁸ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

⁹ Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont.

¹⁰ Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

¹¹ Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

¹² Alabama, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

¹³ Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island.

subject to limitations imposed by law or by rule and regulation. The extent of State financial participation was governed, in general, by one or a combination of the following factors:

- (1) the relative fiscal ability and/or need of the local units;
- (2) the amount of local funds provided;
- (3) the type of case for which State funds could be used; i. e., unemployable or employable cases and cases without legal settlement in a locality within the State; and
- (4) the type of local administrative unit.

As a result of these limitations on the use of State funds, some local units in the 36 States providing State funds for general relief did not receive State aid. In January, State funds for general relief were granted to less than half the local units in 5 States;¹⁴ to a majority of the localities in 10 States;¹⁵ and to all local subdivisions in the 21 remaining States¹⁶ which provided State funds. The proportion that State funds comprised of total expenditures for assistance during 1939-40¹⁷ ranged from less than 25 percent in 5 States¹⁸ to 75 percent or more in 10 States.¹⁹

In January 1940, 12 States²⁰ assumed no responsibility for financing the general relief program. Funds were provided by some counties and by some or all cities and towns in 8 of these States.²¹ County funds were the only source of revenues in Nebraska and South Dakota, whereas in Indiana and Vermont the burden rested entirely on the cities and/or towns.

Variations in the volume of general relief given are reflected by data on amounts expended per inhabitant.²² Unfortunately, not even a rough estimate of the relative proportion of the total need for general relief which was met in each State can be made from the information now available. The wide variations from State to State in ex-

¹⁴ Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Nevada, and Wisconsin.

¹⁵ Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Washington.

¹⁶ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

¹⁷ See the *Bulletin*, February 1941, p. 62, table 6.

¹⁸ Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, and Wisconsin.

¹⁹ Arizona, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Utah.

²⁰ Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont.

²¹ Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

²² See p. 41, table 1.

penditures per inhabitant for general relief strongly suggest, however, that the proportion of total need which is met also varies. Allowances for such differences as may exist in the relative

amounts of need and for differences in the costs of meeting these needs cannot account entirely for the disparities in State expenditures per inhabitant. Undoubtedly a far higher proportion of

Table 1.—Administration of general relief in the continental United States, by State, 1940

State	State agency with supervisory and/or financial responsibility for general relief	Type of local administrative agency				Supervision or administration of special types of public assistance by general relief agency at—		Source of funds			Predominant form of relief		
		County		City agencies	Township, town, village, plantation, or other	State level	Local level	State	Local			Cash	Kind
		Welfare department	Commissioners, supervisors, or other officials						County	City	Township, town, or village		
Alabama	State Department of Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Arizona	State Department of Social Security and Welfare	x				x	x	x				x	
Arkansas	State Department of Public Welfare	x	x			x	x	x	x			x	
California	State Relief Administration	x			¹ x	x	² x	x	x			x	
Colorado	State Department of Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Connecticut	State Office of Commissioner of Welfare			x		x	x	x	x			x	
Delaware	State Old-age Welfare Commission				(1)	x		x	x			x	
Dist. of Columbia	District Board of Public Welfare				(2)	x		x				x	
Florida	None		x	x			³ x		x	x		x	
Georgia	None	x	x	x			³ x		x	x		x	
Idaho	State Department of Public Welfare	x	x			x	³ x	x	x			x	
Illinois	Illinois Emergency Relief Administration		x	x	x			x	x	x		⁴ x	
Indiana	State Unemployment Relief Commission				x					x			x
Iowa	State Department of Social Welfare	x	x			x	³ x	x	x			x	
Kansas	State Department of Social Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Kentucky	None		x	x				x	x			x	
Louisiana	State Department of Public Welfare	x	x	x	x	x	³ x	x	x			x	
Maine	State Department of Health and Welfare		x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	
Maryland	State Department of Public Welfare	x	x	x	x	x	³ x	x	x			x	
Massachusetts	State Department of Public Welfare			x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
Michigan	State Department of Social Welfare	x		x	x	x	⁷ x	x	x	x		⁵ x	
Minnesota	State Division of Social Welfare	x		x	x	x	² x	x	x	x		x	
Mississippi	None		x	x				x	x	x		x	
Missouri	State Social Security Commission	x	x			x	³ x	x	x			x	
Montana	State Department of Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Nebraska	None	x	x				³ x		x			x	
Nevada	State Board of Relief, Work Planning, and Pension Control		x		x	x	x	x	x			x	
New Hampshire	None		x	x	x			x	x	x		x	
New Jersey	State Financial Assistance Commission ⁶		x	x	x			x	x	x		x	
New Mexico	State Department of Public Welfare	x	x			x	³ x	x	x			x	
New York	State Department of Social Welfare	x		x	x	x	³ x	x	x	x		¹⁰ x	
North Carolina	State Board of Charities and Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
North Dakota	State Public Welfare Board	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Ohio	State Department of Public Welfare		x	x		x	⁷ x	x	x	x		x	
Oklahoma	State Board of Public Welfare		x		¹ x			x	x			x	
Oregon	State Public Welfare Department	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Pennsylvania	State Department of Public Assistance	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Rhode Island	State Department of Social Welfare			x	x	x		x	x	x		x	
South Carolina	State Department of Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
South Dakota	None		x					x				x	
Tennessee	None		x	x				x	x	x		x	
Texas	None	x	x	x				x	x	x		x	
Utah	State Department of Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Vermont	None			x	x			x	x	x		x	
Virginia	State Department of Public Welfare	x		x		x	x	x	x			x	
Washington	State Department of Social Security	x				x	x	x	x			x	
West Virginia	State Department of Public Assistance	x				x	x	x	x			x	
Wisconsin	State Department of Public Welfare	x	x	x	x	x	⁷ x	x	x	x		x	
Wyoming	State Department of Public Welfare	x				x	x	x	x			x	

¹ District office of State department.
² County welfare departments only; in Maryland, county welfare department and city of Baltimore; in New York, county welfare departments and some cities.
³ In Delaware, administered directly by the State agency; in District of Columbia, by the District agency.
⁴ District offices of the State Welfare Board, which is the State agency responsible for the administration of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind.

⁵ Only in counties in which general relief is administered by the district office of the State Welfare Board.
⁶ Except in the city of Chicago.
⁷ Only in some local agencies as follows: Michigan, 4 counties; Ohio, unknown number of counties; Wisconsin, 11 counties.
⁸ Except in the city of Detroit.
⁹ Municipal Aid Administration since June 1940.
¹⁰ Except in the city of New York.

total need was met in New York, which expended almost \$8.00 per inhabitant in 1940, than in Mississippi, whose expenditures per inhabitant amounted to only \$.02. On the other hand, it would be impossible to say, on the basis of present information, whether Massachusetts, which expended \$4.67, or Connecticut, which expended \$3.23 per inhabitant, made the more nearly adequate provision in relation to the total need for general relief.

Variations in Administrative Practices

The present discussion of variations in administrative practice is limited to employable and unemployable cases and the form in which relief is given, i. e., cash or kind.

Employable and unemployable cases.—Both employable and unemployable cases received assistance under the general relief program in 39 States, but in at least 3 of these, practices with regard to assistance to employable cases varied considerably among the local units. In 24²³ of the 39 States, both State and local funds were used to provide aid to both types of cases. In California, Nevada, and Rhode Island, State funds for general relief were used entirely for aid to employable cases, and in California and Nevada local funds were used only for assistance to the unemployable group; in Rhode Island, local funds were used for both. Local funds were used for relief to both employable and unemployable cases in Oklahoma, and State funds were used for the latter group only. In 10 States,²⁴ relief was provided to both types of cases from local funds only, and in one—Pennsylvania—from State funds only. The items allowed in the relief budgets in these 39 States were, in general, the same for employable as for unemployable cases.

In 6 States,²⁵ relief to employable cases was given sporadically or on an emergency basis only. Relief to the employable group was allowed only during the winter months in Idaho, and only occasional grants were allowed in Mississippi and Nebraska. Usually the items allowed in the relief budgets of this group of States were the same for both employable and unemployable cases, but

²³ Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

²⁴ Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Vermont.

²⁵ Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, and Nebraska.

in at least one State—Arizona—only food orders were allowed to employable cases.

Relief to employable cases was provided only in a few local units in Delaware and Louisiana. Aid was granted to employable cases in only one county in Delaware, and aid to employable cases in Louisiana was limited to one large urban county and a few cities and towns.

In only one State—South Carolina—was no relief given to employable cases.

Form of relief.—The majority of cases in 17 States²⁶ received relief in the form of cash, whereas in the 31 remaining States²⁷ relief in kind predominated. It should be noted that this classification is based on the form of relief granted the majority of cases in a State and that relief in kind may have been given extensively even in States where cash was the predominant form, and vice versa. For example, although cash payments predominated in Oklahoma and Rhode Island, an appreciable amount of relief in kind was granted. In Illinois, Michigan, and New York, on the other hand, relief in kind was the more common form of assistance except in the cities of Chicago, Detroit, and New York.

The form of relief was determined or influenced by State laws or regulations in 24 States. In 16 of these States,²⁸ a State agency either recommended or required that cash relief be granted to all or specified groups of cases. In addition, the State law in Montana specified cash unless relief in kind proved to be better for the recipient. Actually cash relief predominated in 14 of these 17 States—all except Kansas, Montana, and Washington. A State law or regulation in 7 States²⁹ either required or recommended that relief in kind be granted, and practice in all these States coincided with the law or regulation.

Of the 24 States in which decision was left entirely to the localities, only 3—Georgia, Tennessee, and West Virginia—granted cash relief to the majority of cases aided.

²⁶ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

²⁷ Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

²⁸ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

²⁹ Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, and New Mexico.