

1917

Editorial

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EDITORIAL

MOTHERS' PENSIONS AS A PREVENTIVE OF JUVENILE TRUANCY AND DELINQUENCY

In the January, 1917, issue of the JOURNAL, Roy William Foley, in his review¹ of "The Institution Quarterly" (March 31, 1916),² writes: "The success or failure of the mothers' pension law is thought not yet to be proven. In many counties where it is said to have proven a complete failure the trouble is known to have been in the manner of its administration under incompetent officers."

Members of the Institute should be interested in this law and its administration because of its effect on juvenile delinquency and truancy when it has been properly administered. In judging the law the issues must not be confused. There are two issues: First, the correctness of the theory of the law; second, the efficiency of its administration. On the first there is less and less disagreement. Most of those with whom the writer has come into contact agree that it is a fundamentally sound principle of relief for the state to give to widows with minor children—widows who are fit mothers and who have not a sufficient livelihood to obtain the necessities of life—adequate and regular relief and to supervise the expenditure of the relief so that the result may be an improvement in the welfare of the children. Adequate and regular relief and efficient supervision are the basic principles of the Illinois Mothers' Pension Law. The writer in "The Institution Quarterly" does not question the correctness of the theory of the law, but he does express doubts concerning the efficiency of its administration in many of the counties of Illinois. The members of the Institute should withhold judgment on the second issue until the report of the investigation of the Federal Children's Bureau is published. The Children's Bureau chose to investigate the administration of mothers' pensions in Illinois because it was the first state to enact such a law. The work has been done under the direction of Miss S. P. Breckenridge and Miss Edith Abbott of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. The manuscript will be in Washington on March 31, 1917, and the report will undoubtedly be published in the

¹Journal of American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology, Vol. VII, No. 5, p. 19.

²Published and edited jointly in Illinois by The State Board of Administration, The State Charities Commission and The State Psychopathic Institute.

spring. However, facts are obtainable from the reports of the Cook County (Chicago) Juvenile Court to show the effect of this system of relief on juvenile delinquency and truancy.

The following paragraph appears in the report for 1916:³

"In the 'Delinquent Child and the Home'⁴ figures are given to show that in ten years in the Cook County Juvenile Court 14.5% of all delinquent children came from families in which the father was dead and the mother was trying to do both her own work as caretaker and the fathers' work as wage earner. In the pensioned families the mothers are not permitted to work away from their homes unless the court is satisfied that the children will be properly cared for in their absence. The attempt is also made to grant pensions which will be adequate to get the things absolutely necessary for normal living. The pensions are paid regularly and the mothers receiving them are under the constant and careful advice of the officers of the department. If the granting of pensions is doing nothing else, it is preventing juvenile truancy and delinquency in the families in which they have been granted. A careful study was made of 100 families whose mothers were receiving pensions. It was found that eight children in these families were either truant or delinquent. All but one of these were delinquent or truant before the pension was granted. The pensioned families average about four children to a family. The 100 families had then about 400 children. Eight is less than 2% of 400, and the one child who became delinquent after the granting of the pension makes one-fourth of 1% of 400. Relief is not only being given by the 'Aid to Mothers Act,' but character is being built. To produce the results above indicated the relief must be *sufficient* so that the mothers can really stay at home and do their work as mothers. It must also be *regularly* given and along with it must go *constant and careful advice* from well-trained officers."

JOEL D. HUNTER.

³Not yet published.

⁴Breckenridge & Abbott—Charities Publication Committee.