

INTERCHANGE OF RELIEF INFORMATION AMONG DEPARTMENTS OF PUBLIC WELFARE OF LARGE CITIES

HELEN R. JETER AND MARGARET CLAYBAUGH *

State and Federal reporting systems have failed to provide the kind of relief statistics needed by the public relief agencies in large cities. At the meeting of the American Public Welfare Association in Washington on December 11, 1937, the directors of public welfare departments in several large cities asked that something be done to relieve them of the necessity of telegraphing to other cities of the same size whenever they needed comparable data in a hurry. Moreover, they suggested that information on administrative policies, procedures, and methods sometimes was more important to them than the mere statement of case loads and amounts of relief. The question was referred for action to the Joint Committee on Relief Statistics of the American Public Welfare Association and the American Statistical Association. That committee asked the Social Security Board to establish a new reporting procedure to satisfy this need and appointed a subcommittee to advise the Board in this undertaking.¹

Invitations to cooperate in the project were extended to city or county directors of departments of public welfare or public relief agencies in all cities of 400,000 and over. Smaller cities will be admitted, unless the number of reporting agencies grows too large for prompt handling of the data. By May 25 the public agencies in 16 cities had indicated their desire to be included.² These are Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Rochester, St. Louis, and Washington. Reports for cities in Louisiana, New York, and Pennsylvania are received through the State departments of public welfare. Cities in other States are reporting directly to the Social Security Board.

The reports include only data on general relief³ even though these particular city or county agencies may also administer other types of assistance. Tabulations are issued by the Board

twice each month, on the 15th and the 25th, and are mailed direct to the reporting agencies and to all State departments of public welfare.

Relationship to Other Urban Relief Series

Those who have followed the course of relief reporting in recent years will ask immediately why another reporting system was necessary. Data collected by the United States Children's Bureau from 44 cities in the registration of social statistics form a relief series extending back through 1929; data published monthly by the Social Security Board for 116 urban areas, including the data reported to the Children's Bureau, are also continuous since the beginning of 1929. Moreover, the Social Security Board receives as early as the 7th of each month a telegraphic report from each State on general relief from public funds for the preceding month in more than 100 of the principal cities of the United States. This telegraphic information is reported back immediately to all cooperating cities and also is released to the press. Why were these series insufficient?

The answer lies in the two demands of the cities expressed at the meeting of the American Public Welfare Association: (1) promptness and (2) administrative information. The urban data provided by the Social Security Board, although available promptly each month, are confined to the number of cases and the amount of relief received. The Children's Bureau series, although including many more items such as applications, open case load, and staff, is not available promptly because its primary purpose is for local use and this purpose is effected by indirect collection through local councils of social agencies. Therefore, a new reporting procedure was necessary. Its chief features are (1) direct reporting from the city public-welfare department to the Social Security Board and (2) details about relief administration not previously included in any central reporting system.

Reasons for Opening and Closing Cases

Among the details not reported previously in a monthly central reporting system are the reasons

Social Security

*Bureau of Research and Statistics, Division of Public Assistance Research.

¹ The subcommittee is composed of Ralph G. Hurlin, Russell Sage Foundation, Chairman; Howard B. Myers, Works Progress Administration; Sava S. Schwartz, Philadelphia County Board; and Helen R. Jeter, Social Security Board.

² By this date, reports had been received from 13 of these cities. See p. 17.

³ For definition of general relief, see p. 57.

for opening and closing cases. For example, table 1 indicates that Buffalo, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, and Rochester accepted one-half or more of their cases in April because of loss of private employment. Buffalo, Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Rochester added as

tance in most of the other cities. Acceptance of cases because of cessation of unemployment compensation had not yet affected the relief loads of these cities to any great extent. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, however, reported for March that 8 percent were opened for this reason.

Table 1.—General relief cases accepted in selected cities during April 1938

City	General relief cases accepted during April 1938				
	Number	Percentage accepted for specified reason			
		Loss of WPA employment	Loss of private employment	Chronic illness	Other
Baltimore.....	945	(1)	39.4	8.8	51.8
Buffalo.....	1,854	7.0	67.5	2.4	23.1
Chicago.....	11,122	7.1	56.8	(1)	36.1
Detroit.....	22,894	3.6	62.5	.6	33.3
District of Columbia.....	182	1.1	1.1	39.6	58.2
Milwaukee.....	4,649	2.9	42.2	-----	54.9
Newark.....	2,586	12.0	49.1	14.4	24.5
New York.....	13,477	5.7	(1)	(1)	(1)
Philadelphia.....	6,644	24.0	30.9	-----	45.1
Pittsburgh.....	9,771	8.8	39.7	-----	51.5
Rochester.....	659	9.9	54.9	5.3	29.9
St. Louis.....	1,718	2.1	28.3	2.0	67.6

¹ Not reported separately, included in "other."
² Data not available.

many as 7 percent or more as a result of loss of WPA employment, while in the other reporting cities this was no longer an important problem in April. The proportion of cases added because of chronic illness in the family was 14 percent in Newark and nearly 40 percent in the District of Columbia, but was reported to be of little impor-

The reasons for closing cases in April are shown in table 2. In Buffalo the receipt of unemployment compensation was the most important reason for closing cases, and accounted for one-third of the cases closed; in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh 19 percent of the cases were closed for this reason. In Chicago, the District of Columbia, Milwaukee, New York, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, the most important single reason was transfer to WPA; in four of these cities more than half the closings were for this reason. In most cities, a significant proportion were cases closed because private employment had been secured or earnings had increased.

Cases With One or More Employable Persons Not Employed

The reporting of cases with employable persons has been fraught with difficulties of interpretation. For this reporting series the question has been stated as follows: Of the total number of general relief cases remaining open at the end of the month, how many are cases with one or more employable persons not employed; how many of these have been certified to WPA but are not yet employed by WPA; how many have

Table 2.—General relief cases closed in selected cities during April 1938

City	General relief cases closed during April 1938									
	Number	Percentage closed for specified reason								All other reasons ⁴
		Transferred to—			Relief no longer needed					
		WPA ¹	Old-age assistance	Aid to dependent children	Private employment secured	Increased earnings	Other income increased	Unemployment compensation received	Other	
Baltimore.....	1,663	25.4	0.2	1.2	7.9	-----	1.8	7.1	54.3	2.1
Buffalo.....	1,452	3.0	1.5	1.0	28.6	6.4	3.7	33.6	13.3	8.0
Chicago.....	9,652	61.3	2.7	(1)	19.6	.4	.2	-----	(1)	15.8
Detroit.....	17,197	33.1	.2	-----	13.1	(1)	1.5	-----	-----	52.1
District of Columbia.....	310	28.7	2.0	5.2	16.0	(1)	5.4	-----	4.3	38.0
Los Angeles.....	1,607	7	-----	-----	5.9	(1)	3.4	-----	13.0	62.2
Milwaukee.....	6,359	28.0	.3	.3	7.2	(1)	5.0	12.6	3.8	5.1
Newark.....	2,036	39.0	(1)	(1)	15.0	(1)	(1)	-----	46.1	-----
New York.....	18,205	59.8	.8	.6	16.1	(1)	(1)	-----	4.5	13.7
Philadelphia.....	6,567	22.5	1.7	.3	30.0	1.7	2.0	19.5	5.4	16.9
Pittsburgh.....	9,983	53.1	.4	.1	16.6	9.0	.3	19.3	.5	6.7
Rochester.....	798	18.2	-----	-----	38.0	8.3	1.7	5.8	28.0	-----
St. Louis.....	2,333	70.0	3.0	11.7	3.2	.3	.6	-----	6.1	5.1

¹ Includes very small number of cases transferred to NYA and CCC.
² Includes transfers to aid to the blind, to private relief, to types of assistance not specified in this table, and cases closed for other reasons.
³ Not reported separately.
⁴ Data not available.

not been certified but are eligible for certification under WPA regulations; how many are not eligible for certification to WPA but are considered by the relief agency to be employable?

The results of this question for April are presented in table 3. Only four cities were able to answer the most important question—that about certification to WPA for employment. Newark reported that more than one-half the cases open at the end of the month were cases including an employable person who had been certified to WPA but was not yet employed; in Baltimore and Milwaukee the proportion of such cases was one-fifth. While the meaning of employability in other cities needs clarification, it is worth noting for further investigation that in Buffalo, Newark, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, about three-fourths of the cases were reported as including employable persons. These conditions, still existing in April despite increased transfers to WPA and increased private employment, raise important questions for the relief administrators.

General Relief in Households Receiving Other Types of Aid

The amount of duplication or overlapping between one assistance program and another has been a matter of great interest since the establishment of the Federal Works Program and the enactment of the Social Security Act in 1935. It is of particular interest to these large city agencies, some of which are facing the problem of organizing an integrated field staff to serve cases of several types, others of which can handle the matter only through cooperation with other agencies.

Although most of the agencies are unable to submit complete figures on the number of cases receiving other types of aid in addition to general relief a majority can report a few of the important items. In Rochester almost 5 percent and in Buffalo, Chicago, and New York about 2 percent of the general relief cases were in households in which there was also a recipient of old-age assistance. The number of households receiving general relief in addition to aid to dependent children was of importance in Baltimore only, where such cases comprise one-third of the total number. Cases receiving general relief in addition to WPA earnings are the largest group in Milwaukee, where they are about 25 percent of the total; Rochester and Chicago had 7 and 8 percent, respectively, of such cases; and Buffalo, Detroit, and New York City, about 4 percent.

General Relief and Unemployment Compensation

The newest problem of the relief administrator—on which these reports throw some light—is the possible effect of unemployment compensation upon relief policies, procedures, and case loads.

About 3 percent of the cases in Baltimore and Milwaukee were those receiving general relief during the waiting period for unemployment compensation. Simultaneous payment or supplementation of unemployment compensation in the form of general relief was reported for Baltimore, Buffalo, Milwaukee, and New York. In the first two cities, approximately 4 percent of the cases of general relief also received unemployment compensation; in the latter two, the proportion was smaller.

Table 3.—Cases with an employable person or persons not employed on the last day of April 1938, in selected cities

City	Cases with an employable person or persons not employed on the last day of April 1938							
	Total cases with employable persons		Certified to WPA but not yet employed by WPA		Not yet certified but eligible for certification under WPA regulations		Not eligible for certification to WPA but considered to be employable	
	Number	Percentage of total number of cases on last day of April 1938	Number	Percentage of total number of cases on last day of April 1938	Number	Percentage of total number of cases on last day of April 1938	Number	Percentage of total number of cases on last day of April 1938
Baltimore.....	1,131	20.0	1,131	20.0	0	0	0	0
Buffalo.....	12,852	73.6	(1)	.....	(1)	.....	(1)	.....
Chicago.....	38,222	39.8	6,728	7.0	(1)	.....	(1)	.....
Milwaukee.....	6,254	34.0	3,840	21.5	0	.....	2,408	13.4
Newark.....	12,401	79.9	8,862	56.8	561	3.6	3,038	19.5
Philadelphia.....	53,779	76.4	(1)	.....	(1)	.....	(1)	.....
Pittsburgh.....	27,166	84.3	(1)	.....	(1)	.....	(1)	.....

1 Data not available.

2 Applies to total number of cases receiving relief during the month.

Applications for General Relief

Data on the number of applications are sometimes considered to be important to indicate changes in the need for relief. The reports received in this series include complete data on the flow of applications for general relief, including the numbers pending at the beginning of the month, received during the month, disposed of during the month, and remaining at the end of the month. Variations in administrative practice, however, make the meaning of an application for general relief extremely questionable.

Data for Chicago and St. Louis, for example, include applications which were accepted for certification to WPA employment only and which were not intended for general relief. In other cities, where the certification of cases to the WPA is not a function exercised by the agency administering general relief, the number of applications received during the month may be more significant of the changing need for general relief.

The percentage of applications rejected ranged from 15.6 in Philadelphia to 90.6 in the District

of Columbia, with a majority of cities rejecting from 25 to 50 percent of the applications received for general relief. The large percentage of rejections in the District of Columbia is the result of shortage of general relief funds.

Percentage of Cases Added and Percentage Closed

The percentage of cases added during April was relatively large; in nine cities from 10 to 20 percent of the total open during April were added that month. The smallest percentage was that for the District of Columbia, 6.4; the largest, that for Detroit, 42.8.

The percentage of cases closed likewise varies widely; the Detroit Department of Public Welfare closed 32.1 percent of the total number of cases under care during April, while Rochester closed only 7.4 percent.

In Buffalo, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Newark, and Philadelphia more cases were added during April than were closed, but in the other seven cities the situation was reversed.

Table 4.—Summary of general relief operations of public-welfare agencies, in selected cities, April 1938

	Balti- more	Buffalo	Chicago	Detroit	District of Co- lumbia	Los Angeles	Mil- waukee	Newark	New York	Phila- delphia	Pitts- burgh	Roch- ester	St. Louis
APPLICATIONS FOR RELIEF													
Pending from preceding month.....	743	531	21,375	15,442	0	1,033	0	1,755	8,527	932	1,054	207	954
Received during month.....	1,574	3,090	22,196	31,706	1,936	6,573	6,490	3,276	24,660	11,900	10,429	1,207	5,987
Total during month.....	2,317	3,621	43,571	47,148	1,936	7,606	6,480	5,031	33,187	12,832	12,083	1,414	6,941
Disposed of during month.....	1,486	2,947	25,383	33,624	1,936	6,892	6,480	3,597	25,376	11,427	9,407	1,219	4,786
Accepted for general relief.....	945	1,854	11,122	22,894	182	3,001	4,049	2,586	13,477	9,644	6,771	659	1,718
Accepted for other types of assistance.....	39	0	9,372	0	0	1,473	0	0	19	0	0	0	0
Rejected.....	502	1,093	4,889	10,730	1,754	2,418	1,831	1,011	11,880	1,783	2,636	560	1,075
Percentage rejected.....	33.8	37.1	19.3	31.9	90.6	35.1	28.3	28.1	46.8	15.6	28.0	45.9	(¹)
Pending at end of month.....	831	674	18,188	13,524	0	714	0	1,434	7,811	1,405	2,676	105	2,205
CASES UNDER CARE													
Continued from last month.....	6,367	17,066	94,120	30,611	2,677	15,771	19,643	15,040	170,061	68,045	34,967	8,872	6,979
Added during the month.....	945	1,851	11,122	22,894	182	3,001	4,049	2,586	13,477	8,956	7,254	659	1,718
Total open for month.....	7,312	18,827	105,242	53,505	2,859	18,772	24,292	17,626	192,538	77,001	42,221	9,531	8,697
Percentage added this month.....	12.9	9.8	10.6	42.8	6.4	16.0	19.1	14.7	7.0	11.6	17.2	6.9	19.8
Closed during month.....	1,663	1,452	9,652	17,197	349	1,607	6,350	2,036	18,205	6,567	9,993	708	2,333
Percentage closed during month.....	22.7	7.7	9.2	32.1	12.2	8.0	26.2	11.6	9.5	8.5	23.7	7.4	26.8
Remaining at end of month.....	5,649	17,468	95,590	36,308	2,510	17,165	17,933	15,590	174,333	70,434	32,228	8,823	6,364
RELIEF THIS MONTH													
Number of cases.....	6,706	17,850	96,150	47,150	2,464	17,401	24,027	10,775	188,567	75,593	40,427	8,845	6,822
Total amount.....	\$161,628	\$578,652	\$2,697,018	\$1,270,497	\$64,260	\$427,908	\$301,690	\$500,988	\$7,337,040	\$2,298,306	\$1,070,265	\$305,643	\$126,293
Average per case.....	\$21.55	\$32.41	\$27.01	\$26.94	\$26.08	-----	\$16.30	\$20.87	\$38.91	\$30.42	\$26.47	\$34.56	\$18.51
Percentage of single person cases.....	29.2	22.0	42.8	21.5	81.5	63.3	26.4	33.8	31.7	43.8	40.6	16.1	37.7
Average for single person cases.....	(²)	\$18.14	\$14.59	\$14.05	\$19.21	-----	\$9.43	\$21.93	\$25.46	(²)	(²)	\$16.30	\$8.94

¹ Explanation not provided as to why number of applications disposed of during month does not equal the sum of the number of applications accepted for general relief and the number rejected.

² No percentage computed. (See footnote 1.)

³ Includes 93 cases closed and reopened the same month for supplementation.

⁴ Represents approvals finally effected during month and differs from acceptances.

⁵ Includes cases given relief more than once during the month and is not unduplicated.

⁶ Includes obligations incurred for relief given to cases receiving one of the special types of assistance under the Social Security Act, although the cases receiving this aid are not included in the count.

⁷ Data not available.

Cases Open but not Given Relief

This reporting series includes a complete statement of the monthly balance in the number of cases open or under care. Therefore the number of cases reported as open but not receiving general relief during the month is of interest. The large number of such cases reported in Chicago and in St. Louis is a result of the inclusion of open cases certified for employment to WPA and not receiving general relief, but not yet closed.

Average Amounts of Relief

Data on the number of cases of families and of single persons receiving relief during the month and the amount of obligations incurred for relief to these two classes of cases are significant chiefly for the effect of the varying proportions upon average amounts of relief. Thus, in the District of Columbia, where more than one-half were cases of single persons, the average amount of relief for all cases was \$26.08, the average for families was \$33.39, and the average for cases of single persons was \$19.21. Such data are available for nine cities, as shown in table 4.

The average amounts of relief per case varied among the 12 cities reporting this item for April from \$16.30 per case in Milwaukee to \$38.91 in New York. The average amount of relief to single persons varied from \$8.94 in St. Louis to \$25.46 in New York. The largest average amount per family—\$45.15—occurred in New York, the smallest—\$18.76—in Milwaukee; the rest of the cities averaged between \$30 and \$40 per family, except for St. Louis, which averaged \$24.30.

Variations in Administrative Practice

It is expected that information on relief policies and procedures will be collected from time to time in connection with this series. The first inquiry for this purpose indicates that six of the 12 cities reporting—Baltimore, Newark, New York, Rochester, St. Louis, and the District of Columbia—ordinarily give relief for a half month; Chicago and Los Angeles for a whole month. Buffalo, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh issue relief on a weekly basis; in Milwaukee, while food orders cover a period of 2 weeks, all other relief is given on a monthly basis. Despite these differences in administrative practice, reports for all cities except Baltimore cover the calendar month.

A standard budget is in use in each of the 12 cities. The standard budgets, however, include different items in different cities, and 8 of the 12 cities report some exceptions in cases requiring special diets or other special care.

The standard budget in four cities requires all earnings of adult children to be counted as income. In Buffalo and Rochester 60 percent, and in Milwaukee 50 percent, of such earnings are counted as income. In Chicago, Newark, New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh certain proportions of the earnings of adult children are included in the budget, but these proportions were not reported.

General relief is given to single or unattached persons in all cities. Transients with no legal settlement receive no public relief from the reporting agencies in Buffalo, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Rochester, and only limited care in the eight other cities. Relief given to transients is included in reports on general relief from these eight cities except the District of Columbia; in the report from New York City, only transients who are domiciled are included.

All cities report that general relief is given to families with some income if the amount of such income is less than the standard budget. Eight of the cities give relief to persons currently employed in business or industry. In Baltimore and St. Louis only earnings from part-time employment are supplemented from general relief funds; in the District of Columbia the general policy is not to supplement earnings, although a few exceptions have been made. Data so far reported from Los Angeles apply only to relief to unemployable persons.

Plans for Continued Reporting

The results of the first four months' collection of data indicate a great need for more detailed analysis of the figures reported by local agencies to State agencies and relayed by State agencies to Federal agencies. Variations in administrative practice may affect the validity of the data seriously. The chief advantages of this new reporting procedure are expected to result from the cooperative efforts of local administrators and statisticians who have taken the initiative in demanding more significant figures. It is hoped that State and Federal reporting systems may be improved indirectly by this very active local interest.