

MAINE
LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
COMMITTEE

FOURTH REPORT
to
NINETY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE



INSTITUTIONS

HIGHWAY SAFETY

STATE AID TO EDUCATION

January, 1955

STATE OF MAINE
SUMMARY REPORT
to
NINETY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

From the Senate:

Samuel W. Collins, Aroostook, Chairman
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From the House:

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Stanley H. Low, South Portland
Louis Jalbert, Lewiston
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Director:

Samuel H. Slosberg, Gardiner

January, 1955

INSTITUTIONS

The Legislative Research Committee voted to study the several institutions and each institution was visited by the Committee. The Committee believes that this is the most difficult problem facing the 97th Legislature.

Conditions in some of our institutions are bad. We have seen investigations made by Governors, Legislative Committees, newspapers and private citizens. The time has come when the people of Maine demand that more than a casual eye be cast on the institutional system. It is our belief that this system is not up to par and we make certain recommendations along this line. We strongly urge the members of the incoming Legislature to remember that they are dealing with the happiness and destiny of people when they consider institutional problems. We believe that existing conditions can be corrected with added appropriations and efficient and proper administration.

AUGUSTA STATE HOSPITAL

Probably the greatest single problem at the Augusta State Hospital revolves around the need for added personnel. With an inmate population of 1838 in existence and an employee population of approximately 400, it is obvious that the Legislature must recognize

and for this reason is able to give its patients much of the individual attention that they need. The problem of procuring licensed physicians for the medical staff seems to be prevalent here, as it is in all hospitals. They have only one licensed doctor at this institution.

This hospital has a capacity of 1028 patients and is presently caring for 1131. Although greatly overcrowded conditions are not serious, plant expansion must be given consideration in the very near future.

POWNAI STATE SCHOOL

The declared purpose of Pownal State School is to educate, treat and prepare mentally retarded children of both sexes for a life of usefulness in the community; also to care for those unfortunate children who do not have sufficient power of mind, or will ever have during their lifetime, to take care of themselves.

The Committee has been much concerned over recent reports given out by the head of that institution regarding the conditions as they exist here today. Pownal has an inmate population of 1450 and a present staff of slightly in excess of 200 employees. This institution, like many other institutions, is inviting trouble. With proper treatment, 35% of these patients could return to their homes and undoubtedly earn part of their livelihood. In order to accomplish this, it would be necessary for the school to have additional

instructors; namely, a speech therapist, a medic psychiatrist, and additional social workers. We believe this would be profitable for the State, inasmuch as it would eventually cut down the number of patients in that institution.

A maximum security building is a necessity to the school to assist in keeping control of the patients that are criminally minded.

We do not believe, however, that the conditions at Pownal State School, which were recently outlined in our daily state newspapers, are due wholly to the lack of funds. The Committee believes that a greater part of this difficulty lies with the inefficient administration in this institution from the top levels down.

Pownal represents a very complex problem because so many different mental types are confined there. The question of giving them adequate care is complicated by the fact that the 91st Legislature, nearly 15 years ago, enacted a law permitting municipal judges to commit to Pownal mentally-retarded juvenile delinquents. Some of these undoubtedly were, or later became, criminal psychopaths, and to this extent the security aspect was magnified. Enactment of repeal legislation for the purpose of eliminating this practice is a must. We recommend the following items for your consideration:

1. A maximum security building.
2. Additional living quarters for employees.

3. A separate tuberculosis building to accomodate 40 or 50 patients.
4. A school gymnasium.
5. More social workers to visit the families of these children.
6. A speech therapist.
7. A comptroller.

The Committee feels that a thorough explanation of the Pownal problem is best brought out by the following reproduced editorial. (Portland Press Herald, October 25, 1954)

"Three Conclusions on the Pownal Situation

The problem of improving conditions at Pownal State School and at the State's other correctional institutions is with us, and will remain with us until some radical changes are made. This is apparent now that so many key politicians and people in other walks of life have become aroused by reports of inadequate treatment.

Not all the problems in all the institutions have been revealed. That will be taken care of later, we confidently expect, in view of the number of official and unofficial investigations now under way. But enough facts have come to light to give basis for a discussion of remedies, and it seems to us that three general conclusions can be made at this time.

1. More money is needed, but more money will not solve all the problems.
2. An expert survey is needed to determine whether or not certain types of treatment and certain methods of supervision and discipline have become antiquated.
3. Certain problems will remain insoluble, even if more money is appropriated and no matter how many surveys are conducted.

As for the first conclusion, it is altogether too easy to say that a million dollars, or 25 million, will suddenly transform a home for feeble-minded children, or a school for wayward boys, into a model institution. More money would, up to a certain point, attract better personnel and provide better facilities. And to the extent that it will help we should be interested in larger appropriations. But there are other problems, having nothing to do with finances, which need answering.

Here we come to the necessity for a survey to determine the nature of treatment received by under-privileged and handicapped inmates of our institutions. Are attendants adequately trained? Are the curables getting what is needed to help them bac' to normal lives? Are disciplinary measures, like the use of solitary confinement at the Pownal and South Portland institutions, doing more good than harm? Are modern methods of treatment used as widely as money will allow? These are questions that cannot be answered by newspaper reporters, by politicians or by tax experts. They can only be answered by people skilled in institutional care, and until the resources of such people enter the picture in Maine we will be a long way from knowing exactly what should be done in the way of making the Pownal and South Portland schools in particular, and other institutions in general, greater credits to the State of Maine.

Finally, some problems never can be solved. Let's not fool ourselves on that one. A school for the feeble-minded is not the happiest of places to work, and no amount of coin can attract adequate numbers of trained personnel. Many a trained person, unless he be dedicated, would prefer other employment with less money than to work at Pownal at a higher salary. Here is a limitation not all are aware of as they talk glibly of the wonders money can perform at Pownal.

These three conclusions should be clear enough by now, and they should form the basis of the next steps. It has taken the State about a year to become interested in the plight of its institutions; armed with at least some of the more important facts, we may in the next year see some substantial improvements made."

In support of this recommendation, the Committee submits for your consideration the fact that the children at this school are educated in the public schools in the City of Bath.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Apart from the purely technical problems of institutional operation, and those problems peculiar to individual institutions, the Committee has been impressed by the apparent failure, under the present organization, to delegate authority to various institution heads. The Committee urges that in the future more authority be given to institutional directors. In the past, very often, the needs of the individual institutions have not been adequately presented to the legislature because of inadequate coordination between the Commissioner of Institutions and his subordinate administrators.

Part of this problem undoubtedly stems from the complexity of thirteen separate institutions, each concerned with complex problems, being housed within one department. As a partial solution, the Committee has recommended removing the sanatoria and the School for the Deaf from the jurisdiction and administration of the Department of Institutions. It has also recommended the possibility of such a change for the Military and Naval Children's Home.

This Committee further recommends the creation of two new posts: Deputy Commissioner of Correctional Institutions, and Deputy Commissioner of Mental Institutions. We believe such a reorganization would help to coordinate the activities of the institutions under the two categories, and relieve the Commissioner of many needless details which occupy his time.

As a continuing control over the operation of our institutions, this Committee urges the creation of an advisory council by the Governor. This advisory council would make an accurate and up to date survey of our institutions and plan for their future needs. The council should be nonpolitical, and it should be composed of all elements of our society.

The Committee also recommends a central screening board for employees at our institutions in order to prevent the hiring of undesirable persons who may "float" from one institution to another. We believe this information should be made available to authorities in other states and that they in turn should furnish us with the same type of information.