



Under the Social Security Act, we have a new social services law in the land. It's known as Title 20. It will affect you.

All too often laws like this are passed without the average citizen knowing it; he finds, too late, he can do nothing to change it.

Because Title 20 will affect you, the law provides you must have an opportunity to review the programs it will sponsor. You may be well-advised to study the proposal. You will pay for the programs.

President Ford signed Title 20 into law on January 4, 1975. The plan grew from cooperative efforts of Congress, HEW, and the National Conference of Governors, together with key organizations concerned with services to children and families, and to the aged, blind, and disabled.

It leaves to the states and their citizens the job of making their own social services programs fit the needs of local communities, and -- to assure citizens an opportunity to participate -- requires an open planning process including a public review and comment period of at least 45 days.

This year the public review and comment period begins no later than July 2, the deadline for publication by the Governor of the comprehensive social services plan the state proposes to begin operating October 1, 1975.

What are some of the social services Title 20 programs can offer? Proposed are homemaker services when a mother has to be hospitalized, foster homes for mentally retarded adults ready to leave institutions but not yet ready to live alone, emergency and follow-up services to protect a child from abuse or neglect, and after school care for children so their mothers can have job training and jobs.

Other programs may be chore services for the elderly who would otherwise have to go into an institution, community agencies specializing in job counseling for older youths, emergency shelter while plans are made for young runaways to return home or live independently.

One proposed program is an information and referral service for people who don't know where to turn for help in a crisis; another, for older people, is transportation to senior centers offering varied activities.

Half-way houses for drug-addicted youth needing treatment and a supportive environment could also come under Title 20.

Counseling for the family of a newly blind individual; help in getting talking books and other special services for the blind might also be provided.

And for the family of a handicapped child or senile older person, the provision of part-time care, or guardianship for a confused older person no longer able to manage financial affairs, could also be a part of this program.

It's not expected every community will be provided with all of these services; the purpose is to make local social services available as needed, depending on local problems.

Social services to be provided under Title 20 must be directed to at least one of five goals: (1) to help people become or remain economically self-supporting; (2) to help people become or remain self-sufficient; (3) to protect children and adults who cannot protect themselves from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; (4) to prevent and reduce inappropriate institutional care by making home and community services available, and finally, (5) to arrange for appropriate placement and services in an institution when there is no better alternative.

Programs directed to these goals are expected to cost the taxpayer a total of 2.5 billion a year -- the same amount Federal social service programs have cost since 1972. Present programs now funded, if continued, will be transferred to Title 20. There is no increase in funds appropriated for social services: instead, goals and methods to achieve them have been changed.

In Massachusetts there has been a total of \$69.48 million available from federal assistance programs during fiscal year 1975. Of that, approximately \$50.30 million will have been used by June 30, the end of the current fiscal year.

For fiscal year 1976, \$69.25 million will be available. How much will be used depends upon the programs implemented to serve the public.

The principal changes Title 20 makes are administrative ones and requirements for eligibility. States will be free to select the particular services needed in specific geographic areas rather than restricted to serving only special segments of the population.

Previously programs were required to offer identical services in all parts of the state without regard to variations in local needs.

Based on local conditions, program emphasis can now vary from region to region. In some geographic areas a greater proportion of resources can be allocated for services to children -- on others, to older people.

Eligibility has been greatly broadened. Under Title 20 anyone may qualify for services under a program if the family receives cash payments under AFDC or SSI, or, if the family has an income of less than 115% of a state's median income, as adjusted for family size.

This means the services of the state programs are available to intact families, single people, and childless couples even though they don't qualify as aged, blind, or disabled.

If, however, a person's income is above 80% of the state's median income, as adjusted for family size, the state must charge reasonable income-related fees for services furnished.

Furthermore, states may charge such fees when family income does not exceed 80% of the state's median income; and fees may also be imposed on AFDC or SSI recipients.

Under the law, "income" means the total of all sources of income, without exception. For example, in Massachusetts, the state median income for a family of four is \$14,383 per year.

Therefore, if yours is a family of four, and your annual income is more than \$11,514 (80%), but less than \$16,552 (115%), you could be eligible for services at a reasonable fee; with income of less than \$11,514, you may or may not be charged a fee. Income limits can be different for different services and for different categories of people; eligibility for specific services can be limited to a specific category of eligible people.

Finally, information and referral services, and services to protect children and adults who cannot protect themselves, can be offered without regard to eligibility limits.

You may wish to learn more about Title 20. You can help to implement it by giving state and local authorities as much information as possible about community needs and resources.

Types of useful information are: data on local social service needs and resources; explanation of local social services priorities; suggestions for types of services to help solve specific problems in the local community; and reviews of previous programs' effectiveness.

You can help by writing letters, participating in public hearings on social services, and joining citizen groups actively interested in social services program development.

On or before July 2, the Governor must publish and make available to citizens of the state the proposed annual social services plan. A summary of the proposed services must appear at least three times in the newspaper most people read in each geographic area of the state.

For a more detailed summary, visit or write your state or local social services agency office, or call the local or toll-free number which will appear in the newspaper summary. The complete plan will be available at those offices for people wishing to study it.

Listen for radio and TV announcements about the proposed services plan, and the public review process.

Once the plan has been published, the public has 45 days to study it and send comments to the state agency.

This is your primary opportunity, as a citizen, to express your opinions and make suggestions. Do you feel the proposed plan makes the best use of state-wide resources in light of competing priorities?

Your comments, along with those of others, will be kept on file for public inspection. You can have a hand in this by working through community organizations taking an active part in local programs.

Whatever your position in regard to social services programs, this is your chance to make your feelings known to the planners. If you have an opinion and fail to express it during this 45 day period, you will have no one but yourself to blame if the program fails to come up to your expectations or fails to meet the needs of your community.

This new law is an attempt to put Home Rule back into the hands of those who pay for these services and those who stand to benefit from them.

Here's your chance to speak your piece!