

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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October 23, 1936

Statement on Disfranchisement of Paupers. (Probably a press release)

There has been exhibited to me a statement purporting to have originated in Washington, with Chairman Lonergan (a Democrat from Connecticut) of the Special Senate Committee, claiming to be investigating campaign spending in Maine in which he criticizes the ruling of the Attorney General of Maine in the interpretation of Maine pauper laws with respect to voting.

The Constitution of Maine provides that paupers shall not be allowed to vote, and the Supreme Court of Maine has defined a pauper under that provision of the Constitution.

In all of my many opinions to municipal officers in Maine concerning the right of paupers to vote, I have been guided by the plain wording of the Constitution and the words of the Maine Supreme Court defining what constitutes a pauper with respect to voting rights, and I have consistently advised that the receipt of Federal aid did not constitute the recipient a pauper under the Maine law.

Mr. Lonergan stated that my opinion had been rendered without consulting the latest expressions of the Maine legislature. That is not true. The excerpts of the Maine statutes appearing in the Associated Press reports, and allegedly quoting Mr. Lonergan, must have been carefully chosen to present a different construction of Maine law than a complete reading of the undelated statutes will allow.

There has never been called to my attention any instance where a person lawfully allowed to vote was denied that right because of the fact that he was receiving Federal relief, and assuredly there was no occasion for my giving any different advice than I have given in view of the assurance from the present administration that Federal relief was conducted on a non-partisan basis.

Chairman Lonergan has been misinformed as to the law obtaining in the State of Maine and, apparently, as to the facts.

Clyde R. Chapman
Attorney General