

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from scanned originals with text recognition applied
(searchable text may contain some errors and/or omissions)

SEVENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE

SENATE.

No. 6

STATE OF MAINE.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON HOME FOR FEEBLE MINDED.

To the Legislature of Maine:

The committee appointed by the legislature of Maine in 1903, pursuant to the following order beg leave to file the following report of their doings and findings.

Copy of circulars sent to the assessors of the cities, towns and plantations in the State.

STATE OF MAINE.

In the House of Representatives,

March 11, 1903.

Ordered, The Senate concurring, that a special joint committee of three on the part of the house with such as the senate may join be appointed to inquire into advisability of establishing a "Home for the Feeble Minded" of the State.

Said committee shall ascertain as nearly as possible the number, condition and ages of the "Feeble Minded" of the State, also the probable number who would come under the care of the State if such a home should be established, and such other facts as may be necessary for the information of the legislature.

Said committee shall make inquiries as to methods employed in other states which have institutions of this kind, also the cost per capita per year for support of such inmates.

Said committee shall also inquire as to the best method of securing a suitable location with buildings thereon if such can be obtained, and the probable cost of same. Said committee is hereby authorized to sit during any recess and after the adjournment of the present session, with full power to employ a stenographer.

Said committee shall report in writing, which report shall be filed with the clerk of the house not later than December 1, 1904, and be referred to the next legislature without further action thereon.

House of Representatives, March 11, 1903. Read and passed.
s. u. f. c. W. S. COTTON, Clerk.

In the Senate Chamber, March 12, 1903. Read and passed in concurrence. KENDALL M. DUNBAR, Secretary.

A true copy. Attest:—W. S. COTTON, Clerk.

SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE.

- Messrs. L. C. Morse, of Waldo,
L. M. Staples, of Knox, of the Senate.
- Messrs. Charles S. Purington, of Gorham,
Cyrus W. Davis, of Waterville,
Harry R. Ross, of Bangor, of the House.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge:

1. How many feeble-minded are there in your town who would be eligible to be cared for in such an institution?
(Please give name and sex and age. Any names will not be made public.)
2. Please state the cost to your town for the support of the feeble-minded yearly per capita.
3. How many generations are embraced in the lives of the feeble-minded in your town?
4. Please state any other information pertinent to this matter.
5. What members of this number in your town would contribute toward their support if they were placed in such an institution?

Please give this your immediate attention and make early reply to L. C. MORSE, Liberty, Maine.

Date,.....

Chairman Board of Overseers of Poor, for the
Town of.....

We believe from investigation of the condition existing in Maine, that the time has arrived for the State of Maine to take some action to ameliorate and better the condition of this unfortunate class, and take measure to prevent, as far as we can, their increase in our State.

Twenty states in the union have institutions of this kind which are doing wonderful work in bettering the condition both physical and mental of this class of both sexes.

The visit of your committee to Waverly, Mass., one of the largest and undoubtedly one of the best managed institutions in this country, presided over by Supt. W. E. Fernald, through whose courtesy your committee were shown the workings of the institution.

The institution at Waverly, Mass., was the first institution started in the country in 1848, having by their last report eight hundred inmates, starting with 10 pupils and an appropriation of twenty-five hundred dollars.

Dr. W. E. Fernald, a Maine man by birth and education, is doing wonderful work in bettering the condition of this class of people in Massachusetts.

We must not forget that the amount it costs is of but little consequence when compared with the bettering the condition of this class that are dependent upon us.

The great benefit to be derived in the future by an institution of this kind is to place this class of feeble-minded so that there will be no fear of reproduction.

The higher grade of imbecile, girls, form a floating element that hang around the outskirts of society, marrying, divorcing, deserting and re-marrying, and often doing worse by not marrying at all, having no moral sense of right or wrong, and turning their children over to the State for care, that they may be free and continue their career and by their large and generally blank increase are continually adding to the public burdens to what extent no one but town officers are generally aware.

No parent, however kind, can possibly give to a feeble-minded child, the care and attention as can be done by the facilities of such an institution as the Waverly, Mass., home, or that of Laconia, N. H. The parents of a feeble-minded child desire that such child receive the best of care and above all that the child be contented and happy in its surroundings. Your committee in

their visits to the several institutions which they visited was impressed with the apparent contentment of the inmates.

The physical training of those of a certain class of boys and girls, who are capable of having their physical and mental conditions improved, have ample facilities by competent teachers in the school, on the farm, and in the workshops.

Some are good workers and are nearly made self supported; all the laundry work is done by the inmates and all clothing made that they wear, which teaches this class to become partially self sustaining.

Your committee were profoundly impressed in the manner of instruction given to this class, both mentally and physically, by the competent and faithful teachers employed by these institutions. The generosity of Massachusetts in caring for this unfortunate class has been very generous. They have been unable in Massachusetts to prepare suitable buildings as fast as the state has appropriated money to do so.

There are twenty state institutions and five private ones in this country, all tending to lessen the number of this unfortunate class. The home in New Hampshire is located about one mile from the beautiful city of Laconia. In visiting the New Hampshire home, your committee was cordially received by Dr. Charles S. Little, who showed us over the home. The home consists of 250 acres; starting with 40 pupils in 1902, which increased to 60 in a few months. The first amount appropriated by the state of New Hampshire was thirty thousand dollars, which sum was inadequate to properly place the home in a proper working condition. In this institution, the inmates under supervision, raise all the vegetables, beef and pork, consumed at the home; this home, with their 60 pupils employ four teachers and twelve helpers.

Your committee cannot better emphasize the importance of such an institution to Maine, than by quoting from a paper of Dr. Fernald of the Waverly Home of Massachusetts. "A feeble-minded child is a foreign body in a family or a modern American community."

Who can estimate the waste of money and energy and heart in the extravagant home care of the feeble-minded and idiotic children?

There is no greater burden possible in a home. The feeble-minded child becomes the silent, yet awful skeleton in the closet of many an otherwise happy home.

It is the innocent and helpless cause of an agony of grief to maternal hearts, through long, weary days and months and years; as the mother sees her helpless offspring become the butt of jest and ridicule and a greater burden and care as the years add to its life.

Thousands of sorrowful homes with thousands of susceptible brothers and sisters, are shadowed with the presence and the influence of these imbeciles.

This home care of the feeble-minded child consumes so much of the vitality and energy of the wage earners of the family, that often the entire family becomes pauperized.

It is a public duty to relieve these families of their unbearable burdens.

The problem does not lessen when adult life is reached; the adult males become the town loafers and incapables; the irresponsible pests of the neighborhood; petty thieves, purposeless destroyers of property, incendiaries, and very frequently violators of women and little girls.

It is well known that feeble-minded women and girls are very liable to become sources of unspeakable debauchery and licentiousness which pollute the whole life of the young boys and youth of the community. Almost every town has one or more of these defective women, each having from one to four or more illegitimate children, every one of whom is predestined to be defective mentally, criminal or an outcast of some sort. There is a widespread and insistent demand that these women be put under control.

But the terrible misfortune of having a feeble-minded child is liable, and often does occur in families without a mental, moral, or physical taint for generations back, and where no cause can be assigned. The rich and the poor, the great and the humble are alike liable to this dreaded visitation.

An institute for the feeble-minded is in the nature of an insurance organization. The taxes paid by any individual for its support are only small premiums which insure training and life care to any member of the family who may need it in the future. No family is absolutely secure against such need during its period of growth.

The last census shows a total of 95,000 feeble-minded persons in the United States. It is probable that the actual number is at least 150,000. The existing special institutions now have under training and care, only about 8,000."

Your committee from the last census report and the returns from the various towns in the counties, show that there are of all ages and sexes, about 2,000 feeble-minded in Maine who are styled "incapables." Many of this class have friends and relatives who would gladly contribute wholly, or in part to their support in a home of this kind. From the best information at the command of your committee about 300 between the ages of three and twenty-one years would be eligible to such a home in Maine; many of these however, would be partially aided in their support by their friends and relatives.

Maine is now, and has for a number of years, expended three thousand dollars yearly for the support of her own feeble-minded in other states, the estimated cost for supporting this class by other states, as their reports show, about three hundred dollars per capita. In Pennsylvania the cost has been reduced from three hundred to a fraction over one hundred dollars a pupil per annum.

LOCATION.

Your committee have examined several places with a view of giving some information to the legislature as to the probable expense of establishing a home for the feeble-minded in Maine. There are several places in the vicinity of Belfast, Waldo county, that could be purchased at a reasonable cost. The Curtis farm about two miles from the city, a large two-story house with plenty of land adjoining, could be purchased at a reasonable price, as land is not high in that locality. This farm, situated at the head of the bay, above the city, affording a fine view, with pure air, two important requisites. There are several farms near this; one called the "Otis farm" just across the harbor from Belfast city, with large buildings, formerly a stock farm, could be purchased at a reasonable price, but your committee would recommend that this be left with a committee authorized to buy, where a suitable amount of land with buildings could be obtained, for about ten or twelve thousand dollars in this or any other locality in the State.

There are several places in the towns of Union and Warren in Knox county, where a sufficient quantity of land, beautifully

located, can be obtained which we recommend the committee, when chosen, to visit.

We also recommend the home be located remote from large villages or cities, away from the eyes of the curious, as privacy and not publicity is recommended. The cottage system in vogue in Massachusetts and other states, is also recommended.

After full investigation of this subject, we most earnestly recommend to the legislature of Maine, that humanity demands at our hands the location of such a home for this unfortunate class; that economy and the protection of society demand it. Your committee are indebted to the woman's council of Maine for much valuable aid and assistance in their investigation; and believing that the State of Maine would in the end, be greatly benefited by the establishing of such a home in Maine, we recom-

SUMMARY OF NUMBER OF FEEBLE-MINDED AND COST OF SUPPORTING THEM IN MAINE.

Aroostook county	\$1,627 00
Cumberland county, No. 28, cost.....	2,511 00
Franklin county, No. 5, cost.....	440 00
Hancock county, No. 27, cost.....	1,237 00
Knox county, No. 29, cost.....	1,975 00
Kennebec county, No. 32, cost.....	1,763 00
Lincoln county, No. 30, cost.....	1,811 00
Oxford county, No. 21, cost.....	1,415 00
Penobscot county, 52.....	6,415 00
Piscataquis county, 22.....	1,115 00
Somerset county, No. 23, cost.....	1,174 00
Sagadahoc county, No. 33, cost.....	2,598 00
Waldo county, No. 22, cost.....	830 00
Washington county, No. 31, cost.....	1,966 00
York county, No. 13, cost.....	975 00
	<hr/>
	\$18,693 00
	9,157 00
	<hr/>
	\$27,850 00

No report from Aroostook county, Piscataquis county, Penobscot county.

L. C. MORSE,
L. M. STAPLES.

To the Honorable Legislature of the State of Maine:

As a member of the Special Joint Committee, created by an order duly passed by the House on March 11, 1903, and passed in concurrence by the Senate on March 12, 1903, by virtue of which the authority for investigating the advisability of establishing in the State a home for the feeble-minded was given, and such information to be furnished to the legislature of 1905, beg leave to report as follows:

Having been unable to attend regular meetings of the committee, or to make investigations jointly with them, I feel that in justice to myself and to the committee, that I should submit the results of my investigations and recommendations from such investigations, in the form of a minority report.

I confined my investigations to the counties assigned me, placing in the hands of proper local authorities, the necessary questions looking to the ascertaining of the number of feeble-minded in the various towns, cost of supporting the same, and the help that might be expected from such towns, if an institution like the one contemplated were available.

A large number of replies were received from the various towns in the counties assigned to me, and these replies were turned over in due time to the chairman of the committee, and are available as a part of the investigations of the committee. These replies were prompt, and in some instances, personal letters of explanation accompanied them, showing that the unfortunates were cared for, and would be in any event by friends and would not become charges upon the State charity.

From this source and from personal investigation in addition thereto, I am satisfied that there are 25 to 50 in each county of the State who might be classed as incapable or mentally deficient, and who might properly come within the province or treatment of a home for the feeble-minded; I am satisfied that while there may be more of this class within the limits of the State, that a proper provision for that number would be all that in reason should be undertaken by the State at the present time.

To my mind there can be no question whatever as to the State's attitude toward this class. Without proper and watchful care on the part of the State, they will be a continuous and increasing menace to the physical, mental and moral well-being of our citizenship; and therefore, proper provision should be made for

their treatment, and under conditions that for them, as well as for the State, the best results may follow.

I cannot agree with the majority of the committee, that an appropriation of \$40,000 be made for the establishing and equipping of a home for this class. Any treatment of the question attempted by the State at the present time, must necessarily recognize the importance of beginning at the beginning, establishing a small home in some central portion of the State, which with careful management and under small expense, can, within a period of two years, determine the advisability of a larger institution fully adapted to the situation as it may then present itself.

I do not believe the State should be parsimonious in the providing of funds for the care of the unfortunates within her borders; and inasmuch as so many other worthy objects of State aid, including an appropriation for the blind, are pressing upon us at the present time, it is my judgment that a sum not exceeding \$20,000 be appropriated and made available, \$15,000 of which should be made available the current year, 1905, for the purchase and equipping of a home, and \$5,000 for maintenance in 1906.

Respectfully submitted,

CYRUS W. DAVIS,
HARRY R. ROSS.

Your committee annex to their report the address to the legislature of Maine by Bigelow T. Sanborn, M. D., superintendent of Maine Insane Asylum, giving his views in a very able manner which is made a part of this report.

AUGUSTA ME., APRIL 20, 1904.

To the legislative Committee relating to the Feeble-Minded:

GENTLEMEN:—An invitation was extended me last evening by the ladies of Portland who are interested in the welfare of the feeble-minded of the State to be present at a meeting to be held by your committee at the Falmouth House this evening. I am very sorry that a heavy cold coupled with the inclement weather of to-day prevents me from being present at your hearing as I would be very glad to learn what has been accomplished during the past year in the investigations made regarding this dependent and defective class. In 1880 the United States Cen-

sus in its enumeration gave 1542 insane and as I recall not far from 1,300 imbeciles and feeble-minded as the population of this class then living within the borders of the State. From the enumeration of 1890 we find that the insane population of the State was shown to be somewhat less, but as I recall without having the statistics before me, the feeble-minded remained practically the same. I have endeavored to obtain the census of 1900 relating to our dependent population but have been unable thus far to procure it and as I understand it will not be ready for publication until late in the summer or autumn. As the Revised Statutes of Maine include idocy and imbecility, (which may be but another term to express feeble-mindedness) with insanity, hence the two institutions devoted to the care of the insane have a population of at least twenty-five or twenty-seven hundred people as a resource for Institutional treatment, a large per cent of whom there has been and is likely to be a demand for care. It is a well recognized fact in medical literature that during the development stage of infancy or early childhood degenerative processes sometimes supervene and that full physiological development of the growing child does not take place, so that at the age of puberty or before, we find that the subject is left in a weakened condition physically and mentally. This class of defectives is naturally divided into three groups, viz.: First, the idiot where pathological processes are established even before birth and the subject is deprived of all higher mental power and who is unable to acquire the simplest accomplishments; second, the imbecile who is capable of acquiring simple accomplishments but unable to exercise the reasoning power beyond the extent to which a child is capable, and third, there is a large class of subjects who are defective as to judgment and in whom this defect is of similar origin to, though not as intense as, that of the imbecile or idiot, which we recognize as the feeble-minded. There is however no well defined line of demarcation between these groups which I have enumerated; but there is an invisible transformation passing up from the lower to the higher physical and mental organization. It is however very easy to diagnose between the person who is suffering slightly from a condition of feeble-mindedness and that of the confirmed idiot who is incapable of acquiring and who in many instances may be devoid of all articulate speech and whose special senses may

be so much involved as to be bereft of hearing, seeing, tasting or smelling. It will be seen at once that from all of this degenerative class of cases the two institutions of the State devoted to the care of the insane are liable to be called upon for care and treatment. If a commitment is received stating that the condition of such a case has been inquired into and two reputable physicians have testified under oath that such a person has lost his or her power of self-control and has become bereft of reason, then it becomes our duty to receive and detain for proper protection. How then can it be expected that the institutions of the State whose limits of accommodation does not exceed 900 patients will be able to continue its care for this large number of persons who are daily knocking at its doors for admission? The institutions at Augusta and Bangor which have already practically reached their maximum capacity should be left to devote its institutional energies to care for the absolutely insane and not be expected to extend aid to the idiot, the imbecile or the feeble-minded. The hospital at Augusta has already quite a large number of that class of patients that could be better cared for and naturally belong to an institution devoted to the feeble-minded, and I have reason to believe that the same experience is noted at Bangor. The progressive and indefatigable investigations which have been prosecuted in lines of rational treatment during the past quarter of a century have demonstrated beyond a doubt the necessity of widely different methods of treatment to be brought into requisition in properly caring for the actually insane and feeble-minded. The domiciling of the two classes is incompatible and one is frequently a menace to the other. An institution devoted to the feeble-minded should have its school for instruction in elementary education. Such an institution should be located where a large acreage can be obtained in order that the maximum number of its patients can be occupied in some useful manual employment in the open air, where the institution can be made as nearly self-supporting as possible. Time nor space will not allow me further to trespass upon your time and I will simply add that I believe the time is ripe when the State should take action in the direction of providing for this defective class independently of the State institutions for the insane. Incompatibility of treatment side by side demands a separate institution. The opportunity of relieving the families

who are so unfortunate as to have among its members the "skeleton in the closet" and allowing free opportunities for productiveness will enhance, in the aggregate, the financial welfare of the State and instead of being a burden will become a source of pecuniary benefit. The greatly decreased social advantages of the family, and the worry and wear of the fathers and mothers who are obliged to devote their energies to the care of an unfortunate member of the family destroying opportunities to provide and earn a more efficient livelihood not only for their own benefit but for that of the community as well, demand that immediate steps should be taken to provide an institution for scientific care and treatment. In its moral relations there is a loud call for steps to be taken in the above direction. From a philanthropic and humanitarian standpoint cogent reasons can be presented in this direction for the proper protection and education of this defective class. The enlightened trend of increasing civilization and the benevolence of an intelligent and appreciative public and legislative body will, I have no doubt, when the matter is laid before them in all of its important bearings, take into consideration the necessity of immediate action, and will see to it that such wise provisions are made as will conduce to the well-being of this class which are in so much need of institutional treatment. Such a procedure will not only redound to the credit of the citizens of the State, but a consideration which is of far more importance, will ameliorate the condition of the feeble-minded and afford opportunities for improvement.

I have the honor to remain,

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

BIGELOW T. SANBORN.

STATE OF MAINE.

IN SENATE, January 12, 1905.

Presented by Mr. MORSE of Waldo, and on motion by same Senator laid on table to be printed, pending reference to the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs.

KENDALL M. DUNBAR, *Secretary*.