

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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ALCOHOLISM

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We, the remaining members of the Liquor Research Commission without a chairman, having met by mutual consent, present this report to the 96th Legislature to inform you concerning the present status of that Commission and of the program entrusted to us.

We report in this irregular fashion because we have no chairman through whom we can report. The resignation of our chairman was accepted recently by Governor Cross, but for many months prior we have been without leadership. It is not our design to criticize our chairman. During the life of the Commission up to within a year, he gave us vigorous and effective leadership. Under his able direction we made our report to the last Legislature which brought uniform commendation and a sufficient appropriation to initiate our program. We have nothing but appreciation for the leadership which he gave.

Out of fairness to the rest of the Commission, however, we would state simply that despite the vote of the Commission to meet monthly, and the mandate of the law that we must meet twice annually, we have met but once, November 28, 1951, since the last Biennium. Individually we have attempted to act, but without the call of the chairman we could neither meet nor function. By whose design or lack of interest that failure came about, whether of the chairman or of some superior, we do not know. One or another of us attempted to get action both by an appeal to the chairman and by an appeal to Governor Payne, but without result. The record is that upon the action of the last Legislature we met, sketched a plan of action as ambitious as our appropriation permitted, entrusted the execution of our program to the chairman and adjourned to meet monthly. We have not been called together since.

At our one official meeting we did outline a program which we present as evidence of our good faith in undertaking the work of the Commission.

MEETINGS

1) We were to meet monthly, at the call of the chairman. We were to employ secretarial help as needed but not to seek the services of a full time executive.

RADIO PROGRAMS

2) We ratified the purchase by our chairman of the recorded broadcasts, The Lonesome Road, which dramatize the problem of the alcoholic, and made those recordings available to the several radio stations of our state. They have been used as sustaining programs without further cost to the state and have been well received.

CONFERENCE

3) We projected a Conference on Alcoholism, after a fashion found effective in Massachusetts and elsewhere, to bring the problems of alcoholism into the purview of professional men of all sorts who deal with some phase of the problem: doctors, lawyers, clergymen, educators, social workers, and the like. Arrangements for location and leadership were entered into but at some point without consulting the Commission the chairman dropped the matter.

EDUCATION

4) We voted to ask the Department of Education to designate one of its members to be our liaison, to go at our expense to a session of the Yale Summer School of Alcohol Studies, and subsequently to work out with us a proper method by

which alcohol education could be added to the curriculum both of teacher's colleges and of public schools. It was to be our controlling principle that such information would be presented as factual material concerning alcohol, and not as propaganda concerning the desirability of its use.

REHABILITATION

4) Recognizing the tremendous expense involved in any adequate program for the rehabilitation of alcoholics, we proposed to make a modest start at the point where we could show the greatest return for the least expenditure, and to expand our program as fast as it commended itself to the public. Our first move was to be to establish several "Information Centers" where in conjunction with existing groups and agencies dealing with alcoholics we could make available the most up to date helpful information to those concerned. Such centers have already proven their worth in other states. Thereafter we were to explore the feasibility of establishing out-patient clinics attached to existing general hospitals, one or more in-patient clinics for extended treatment of critical cases, and eventually of some such place of modified detention and rehabilitation for chronic cases as an "Alcoholic Farm". Knowing that the expense of any such ventures was prohibitive on our appropriation it was to have been our strategy to be prepared for further recommendation to this Session of the Legislature for the extension of the program. We regret that we are not prepared to do so.

We have sketched briefly for you the projects which we set up in good faith, and the reason why no more has been accomplished. We would point out that although by reason of our inaction we are delinquent, we were not wasteful, and with the appropriation nearly intact we lack only a chairman to throw our program into gear. Unless our appropriation is withdrawn or a chairman not forthcoming every step in our carefully laid program can be pursued according to plan. Even those who have been most critical of our inactivity have surveyed our proposals and pronounced them excellent.

Having made our report we are moved to add a statement concerning the continuance of this program. There is a bill before you to abolish this Commission and to refer the problem of alcoholism to the Department of Health and Welfare for appropriate action. (LD 237, HP 206) That bill is sponsored by those who are impatient to get action. We have no quarrel with their impatience and readily admit that their criticisms are just. We are quite as anxious as they to get action, and if we were convinced that the solution which they suggest were the proper one we would gracefully withdraw. Instead, because of our conviction that their proposal is no adequate solution, we place ourselves in the embarrassing position of asking the Legislature not to accede to their request, for these reasons:

1) The proposal before you to abolish the Commission will lose to the state the services of a group of citizens who have gone to some lengths to become informed in this area and are desirous of using the information gathered for the welfare of the State. We served on this Commission for two years without funds except those raised by our chairman from private sources. The per diem allotment written into the present law was over our protest and is of no moment to us. All we have asked for ourselves is the opportunity to serve the State.

2) The proposal before you has selected one aspect only of the total problem, that of the health problem of alcoholism, as the only significant item of our work for continuance, without reference to the equally important aspects of education and research.

3) The proposal before you allocates a problem to a department of State which has neither the desire nor the personnel to initiate such a program, without

defining its task nor designating its procedure. To us that looks like burying a program rather than activating it.

4) The proposal before you would place within one department of State that which must eventually integrate with several departments if it is to prove effective. Experience may demonstrate what final disposition this program may have among the orderly departments of state government but it is our contention that until its functioning has matured to the point where its scope is clearly defined this program needs the constant interest and guiding direction of a citizens committee concerned about the total program.

You are aware that for our Commission to continue requires no legislative action. Our appropriation is made and remains unless you act to withdraw it. Our interest is as keen as ever and our concern to act quite as great. In conference with the governor we have been assured of his interest to get a competent chairman, and of his concurrence in our present judgment that we must procure a full time executive director to expedite our plans. We protest that within the scope of our program and under the guidance of our interest there is more promise of effective action in this area, than in the bill LD 237, HP 206, or in any similar proposal*.

Respectfully submitted,
Mr. William T. Maybury
Rev. Jean P. Cossette
Miss Lucia M. Cormier
Mrs. Agnes F. Gibbs
Mr. C. Freeman Olsen
Rev. Ellis J. Holt

*(It is our understanding that since this report was prepared another proposal similar to LD237, HP206, has been submitted which we have not had opportunity to study.)