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# THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Department of Commerce and Labor

CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Washington

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BUREAU.

The Children's Bureau was established by an act of Congress approved April 9, 1912, and began active operations upon the passage of the legislative, executive, and judicial appropriation bill on August 23, 1912. The text of the law establishing the Bureau is as follows:

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That there shall be established in the Department of Commerce and Labor a bureau to be known as the Children's Bureau.

SEC. 2. That the said bureau shall be under the direction of a chief, to be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and who shall receive an annual compensation of five thousand dollars. The said bureau shall investigate and report to said department upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people, and shall especially investigate the questions of infant mortality, the birth rate, orphanage, juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents and diseases of children, employment, legislation affecting children in the several States and Territories. But no official, or agent, or representative of said bureau shall, over the objection of the head of the family, enter any house used exclusively as a family residence. The chief of said bureau may from time to time publish the results of these investigations in such manner and to such extent as may be prescribed by the Secretary of Commerce and Labor.

SEC. 3. That there shall be in said bureau, until otherwise provided for by law, an assistant chief, to be appointed by the Secretary of Commerce and Labor, who shall receive an annual compensation of two thousand four hundred dollars; one private secretary to the chief of the bureau, who shall receive an annual compensation of one thousand five hundred dollars; one statistical expert, at two thousand dollars; two clerks of class four; two clerks of class three; one clerk of class two; one clerk of class one; one clerk, at one thousand dollars; one copyist, at nine hundred dollars; one special agent, at one thousand four hundred dollars; one special agent, at one thousand two hundred dollars, and one messenger at eight hundred and forty dollars.

SEC. 4. That the Secretary of Commerce and Labor is hereby directed to furnish sufficient quarters for the work of this bureau at an annual rental not to exceed two thousand dollars.

SEC. 5. That this Act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

Approved, April 9, 1912.

The suggestion for the establishment of a children's bureau was first made by Miss Lillian D. Wald, head of the Nurses' Settlement in New York. Her conception of a Federal bureau devoted to the study and popularization of the needs of children appealed not only to a great number of the most authoritative individuals and organizations engaged in work for children, but also to the general public, which, through the work of the Department of Agriculture, was prepared for similar governmental service in the interests of children. A bill for the establishment of the Bureau was introduced in Congress in the winter of 1905-6, through the efforts of the National Child Labor Committee and many cooperating agencies. Although indorsed by the President and by members of the Cabinet, and warmly advocated by Members of both House and Senate, the bill failed to reach a vote. In the Sixtieth Congress (1908-9) the bill was reintroduced; it received the approval of the regular committee to which it was referred, and it was made the subject of a special message by the President, but it again failed to reach a final vote. In the Sixty-first Congress (1909-10) it had a similar history. The Sixty-second Congress passed the bill, and it was approved by the President.

#### SCOPE OF THE BUREAU.

##### TERMS OF THE ACT.

The act establishing the Bureau provides that it shall investigate and report upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people, and shall especially investigate the questions of infant mortality, the birth rate, orphanage, juvenile courts, desertion, dangerous occupations, accidents, and diseases of children, employment, and legislation affecting children in the several States and Territories.

##### THE INTENTION OF CONGRESS.

The Senate Committee on Education and Labor, to which was referred the bill to establish the Children's Bureau, said in its report:<sup>1</sup>

The bill as drawn and recommended for passage confines the operation of the Bureau primarily to the question of investigation and of reporting the same, the design and purpose being to furnish informa-

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<sup>1</sup> 62d Cong., 1st sess., S. Rept., No. 141.

tion in this general way from all parts of the country to the respective States to enable them to deal more intelligently and more systematically and uniformly with the subject. The bill is not designed to encroach upon the rights nor relieve the States from the duty of dealing with this subject, but to furnish the information to enable them to more successfully deal with it. It was the opinion of the committee that the duty devolves primarily upon the States to legislate upon this important subject, and the States can more effectively deal with it. But it seemed to the committee that there was a duty upon the part of the National Government to aid in getting information and data with a view of assisting in this work, and that the National Government could get such information and data more effectively than the respective States.

#### PLANS FOR IMMEDIATE WORK.

The first work of the new Bureau will be to bring together the existing material on the subjects within its scope, so that it may make a thorough survey of the field and avoid duplicating work which has already been done either by public or private agencies.

#### STATISTICAL HANDBOOK.

The United States Government through various bureaus has already collected much statistical material relating to children, but it is scattered through many publications and has never been brought together and correlated by persons interested primarily in children. The Bureau will proceed to bring this material together, and, using it as a basis, will issue a convenient handbook of statistics of children, so that the important data which the Government has compiled may be readily available for all agencies engaged in work for children.

#### LIBRARY OF CURRENT PUBLICATIONS.

Current literature, both in this country and abroad, is rich in matter relating to children. The office of librarian-reader has therefore been established, requiring the services of one who is not only a trained and experienced librarian, but is also thoroughly familiar with the principal modern languages and trained in sociology and economics, so that it will be possible to select, translate if necessary, and prepare for immediate use the significant material published on child problems.

#### LEGISLATION AFFECTING CHILDREN.

The law obviously intends that the Bureau shall become a clearing house for information regarding actual or pending legislation in the several States affecting children. This legislation should be digested in those cases in which the work has not already been done by some

other Government bureau or by some private agency.<sup>1</sup> The necessity for digests is obvious, in view of the important part played by the law in many of the problems of child welfare.

#### ORIGINAL INVESTIGATION OF INFANT MORTALITY.

The Bureau will begin at once an original investigation of infant mortality, because conditions existing in this country show its urgency and because it is fundamental to the later work of the Bureau. This inquiry will be directed especially toward the social aspects of the problem. It will not duplicate the work of other governmental or volunteer agencies. The field at present will be confined to a few comparatively small communities.

#### BIRTH REGISTRATION.

Because the importance of adequate birth registration in reducing infant mortality is universally recognized, the Bureau will cooperate with the organizations, governmental and volunteer, now working for registration in this country. The New England States, Pennsylvania, and Michigan were in 1910 the only States included by the Census Bureau in the registration area for births as having laws for birth registration so enforced as to give reasonably satisfactory results. In most of the States births are not properly recorded, either because there is no law requiring their registration or because the existing law is inadequate or is not enforced. Unless the local social agencies working for the welfare of babies can learn of the birth of a child they can not directly help that child. Unless there can be secured reliable knowledge as to children born, there can be no reliable knowledge as to the birth rate, nor as to the proportion of children who die.

The general recognition of the necessity for registration is well indicated by the fact that the General Federation of Women's Clubs at their biennial meeting held at San Francisco in July, 1912, passed a resolution calling upon the Bureau to prepare in brief popular form material showing the necessity for birth registration and the best method of securing it. The Bureau is now preparing material in compliance with this request.

#### POPULAR PAMPHLETS.

The Bureau will also issue from time to time brief popular pamphlets on other subjects assigned to it by law. These pamphlets will be designed for wide distribution, and if necessary will be translated into foreign languages.

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<sup>1</sup>The Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor, and the Russell Sage Foundation have done considerable work of this nature, and doubtless other valuable digests are available.

It is clearly recognized that the program thus mapped out is a mere beginning and that the field of the Bureau is far wider than these first plans would indicate, but it will be some time before the Bureau can do more than to endeavor to carry out this program. Suggestions for further work will, however, be carefully considered at any time.

It must be borne in mind that the Children's Bureau has no power to do administrative work. It can not make any regulations concerning children, nor create any institutions for them. Its duty is solely to study and report upon conditions affecting the welfare of children. It may publish facts it secures, in any form approved by the Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor. It will endeavor to secure pertinent facts and to present them promptly and clearly for use and popular distribution. Its effectiveness must depend upon the use made of these facts by the people of the United States.