

FEBRUARY 14, 1979

## HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS:

A HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING WAS HELD FEBRUARY 14, 1979, IN THE CAPITOL ANNEX ROOM #20. THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER BY CHAIRMAN HOLMES AT 12:30, AND ALL MEMBERS WERE PRESENT EXCEPT FOR REP. HEMSTAD.

HOUSE BILL #196 -- SPONSOR: REP. HOARD ELLIS, DISTRICT #93, STATED THAT THE INTENT OF HIS BILL IS TO ASSURE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE DIVISION OF VISUAL SERVICES. IT CURRENTLY EXISTS BY ADMINISTRATIVE RULE ONLY. THE DIVISION RECEIVES A SHARE OF THE STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS. THIS BILL DOESN'T MAKE ANY SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN ITS MAKE-UP, IT ONLY GIVES THE DIVISION RULE MAKING POWER TO MAXIMIZE ITS EFFECTIVENESS. PROPOSERS: REP. JAMES SCHULTZ, DISTRICT #48, STATED THAT HIS CONSTITUENTS HAVE WORKED WITH THE DIVISION AND THEY ARE LIKE A FRATERNITY. HE WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTED THIS BILL. MOLLY CLASS, SPEAKING IN BEHALF OF TONY BAILEY, STATE PRESIDENT OF THE MONTANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND, REPRESENTING OVER 250 MEMBERS WHICH HAVE ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS URGING THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MAINTAIN VISUAL SERVICES' SEPARATE IDENTITY. MS. SHARON CROMIN, HELENA RESIDENT AND PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATOR FOR VISUAL SERVICES HAS WORKED WITH THE PROGRAM FROM ITS BEGINNING IN 1937. SHE STATED HISTORY OF THE VISUAL SERVICES DIVISION AS HAVING HAD A VERY QUESTIONABLE LIFE. ALTHOUGH ITS HAD A HARD LIFE, IT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE BEST AND FASTEST GROWING PROGRAMS. THE BLIND HAVE BEEN UNITED AND HAVE GIVEN IT THEIR FULL SUPPORT. SHE WENT INTO THE HISTORY OF THE VISUAL SERVICES DIVISION WHEN IT BEGAN IN 1937 WITH THE PUBLIC WELFARE ACT WHICH ALLOCATED \$30 PER MONTH FOR THE BLIND TO LIVE ON. THE LION'S CLUB, REALIZING THE PROBLEM OF A LACK OF REHABILITATION, STARTED THE MONTANA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND. THEY WERE GIVEN NO APPROPRIATION. IN 1940 THEY RECEIVED \$1,500. IN 1943 THEY WERE PLACED IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE AND IN 1952 DECIDED SUPERVISION SHOULD GO TO ALL 53 COUNTIES. IT WAS DISASTROUS, THOUGH. IN 1954 FEDERAL LEGISLATION MADE IT A REQUIREMENT THAT THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD HAVE A DIVISION. IN 1972 IT WAS MOVED OVER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION SERVICES AND HAS BEEN UNDER ADMINISTRATIVE RULE EVER SINCE. MRS. PROCTOR, SECRETARY TO THE MONTANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND STATED THAT THEIR GROUP NEEDS STABILITY. THEY HAVE PUT TOGETHER PROGRAMS NOW WHERE NEWLY BLINDED PEOPLE CAN BE REHABILITATED AND ARE ABLE TO HELP OTHER NEWLY BLINDED. PHYLIS HOMKA, BLIND MEMBER, STATED THAT PART OF THEIR SERVICE TO HER WAS TO GET HERSELF TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT SHE WAS BLIND. SHE NOW WORKS AS A COUNSELOR IN 22 COUNTIES. THEY HAVE FOUND THAT SIGHTED COUNSELORS HAVE A PROBLEM UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF THE BLIND; SO THEREFORE THEY USE A LOT OF BLIND COUNSELORS, WHICH GIVES THEM SATISFYING WORK AS WELL AS BETTER SERVICE TO THE NEWLY BLINDED. IN 1975, BECAUSE OF THE UNUSUAL COOPERATION OF THE DIVISION OF VISUAL SERVICES AND THE MONTANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND, THEY WERE ASKED TO COME TO NEW YORK TO A NATIONAL CONVENTION TO DISCUSS THE WAY IN WHICH THEY IMPLEMENTED THEIR PROGRAMS SO WELL. DR. ROGER LEWIS, OPTOMETRIST FOR FIVE YEARS, STATED THAT HE IS IN FAVOR OF MAINTAINING THIS SERVICE, BECAUSE THE DIVISION'S EMPLOYEES ARE UNIQUE IN THAT NOT ONLY DO THEY WANT TO BE THERE, AND ARE HIGHLY TRAINED, BUT THEY REALLY CARE. THE SERVICES PROVIDED WOULDN'T BE AS GOOD IF THEY WERE SCALED DOWN. REP. GOULD, DISTRICT #98, SAID THAT HE IN DENVER COMMENDED THE VISUAL

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SERVICES PROGRAM IN MONTANA AS AN EXCELLENT MODEL FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW. MR. MARYLN MATSON, A PREVIOUS MANAGER OF SAFEWAY UNTIL HE LOST HIS SIGHT SAID THAT, "THE VISUAL SERVICES AND MONTANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND WORKING TOGETHER COUNCELING HIM TAUGHT ME HOW TO LIVE BLIND. THEY HELPED ME TO THINK RATHER OF WHAT I COULD STILL DO, RATHER THAN WHAT I COULDN'T DO. MY LIFE WAS A CLOSED BOOK BEFORE THE TWO GROUPS CAME TO MY AID. NOW I HAVE A NEW CHAPTER IN MY LIFE. PLEASE GIVE SUPPORT TO HOUSE BILL #196 TO HELP THE BLIND OF MONTANA REGAIN AND MAINTAIN A PRODUCTIVE ROLE IN SOCIETY." MS. ROSEMARY ZION, REPRESENTING THE MONTANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND GAVE INFORMATION FROM VARIOUS STATES SHOWING THAT SEPARATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND ARE BEST. IF SERVICES ARE COMBINED, THEY GENERALLY TEND TO BE ABOUT HALF AS EFFECTIVE. OPPONENTS: MS. JUDITH CARLSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION SERVICES EXPLAINED THAT BY LEGISLATIVELY MANDATING THE GROUP'S EXISTENCE AND THEIR FUNDING, IT COULD CUT OTHER GROUPS OUT. OTHER STATES THAT DO HAVE SEPARATE BLIND AGENCIES RECEIVE MUCH LESS THAN 15% OF THE TOTAL FEDERAL FUNDS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION. AN ADVISORY COUNCIL AND A DIVISION FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED THAT IS PROVIDED FOR IN THIS BILL IS ALREADY IN EXISTENCE. THIS SHOULD NOT BE A LEGAL REQUIREMENT BECAUSE IT COULD CONSTRAIN THE DEPARTMENT FROM MAKING DECISIONS IN THE EVENT THAT OTHER NEEDS AND SERVICES BECOME MORE PRESSING. THEY FEEL THAT THIS IS UNNECESSARY LEGISLATION SINCE IT'S ALREADY BEING DONE.

HOUSE BILL #342 -- SPONSOR: REP. HOWARD ELLIS, DISTRICT #93 STATED THAT THIS BILL IS ALREADY ON THE BOOKS TO GRANT PREFERENCE TO DISABLED, BUT THERE NEEDS TO BE RULEMAKING AUTHORITY GIVEN TO THE SRS AND GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW. MS. SUSAN FORD, KALISPELL, STATED THAT THE BILL HAS BEEN INTRODUCED TO ESTABLISH RULEMAKING AUTHORITY FOR LAWS WHICH WERE PASSED IN 1953. PLEASE GIVE HOUSE BILL #342 A DO PASS RECOMMENDATION SO THAT GRANTING OF CONCESSIONS CAN BE IMPLEMENTED. MS. ROSEMARY ZION EXPLAINED THE FEDERAL RANDOLPH SHEPPARD ACT AND MONTANA'S VERSION OF THE LITTLE RANDOLPH SHEPPARD ACT WHICH CURRENTLY GIVES NO ONE RESPONSIBILITY OR PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW. EVERYONE AGREES THAT THIS LAW IS NOT WORKING CURRENTLY BECAUSE OF A LACK OF RULEMAKING AUTHORITY. THE VISUAL SERVICES DIVISION WANTS TO HAVE IT ENFORCED. OPPONENTS: MR. ARLEE STRONG, OWNER OF A VENDING COMPANY, ASKED THE QUESTION, "COULDN'T THE VENDER SUPPLY MACHINES AND GIVE THE REVENUE TO THE BLIND?"

THE FOLLOWING ACTION WAS TAKEN:

REP. FABREGA MADE THE MOTION TO GIVE HOUSE BILL No. 196 A DO PASS AS AMENDED. THIS MOTION CARRIED WITH A UNANIMOUS VOTE.

REP. FABREGA MADE THE MOTION TO GIVE HOUSE BILL No. 342 A DO PASS AS AMENDED. THIS MOTION CARRIED WITH A UNANIMOUS VOTE.