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**The Problem of
The Feeble-Minded
and
The Program of the
State Board of Control**



**Summary of Requests of Board
Submitted to Legislature**

SAINT PAUL

1919

“The problem of the mental defective in the home, the school, the street, the police court, the jail, the brothel, the pauper asylum, constitutes one of the great sociological and economic questions of modern times.”

A great eastern authority has thus expressed the complexity and importance of feeble-mindedness as a social disease. The state of Minnesota has paid, and is paying a heavy price by reason of inadequate provision for the feeble-minded. The present statement is an effort to shed some light upon the situation and to indicate what the plans of the State Board of Control are in meeting the grave menace of mental deficiency.

The essential thing in any social movement is that public opinion shall be informed—once in possession of the facts it can be depended upon to initiate action and achieve results.

WILLIAM HODSON.

Director, Children's Bureau
State Board of Control.

St. Paul, February 5, 1919.

**The Number of Feeble-Minded Persons in the State is
Dangerously Large. The Provision for Care
is Distressingly Inadequate.**

Experts have said that there are some ten thousand feeble-minded persons in the state of Minnesota, and while this estimate is simply a well informed guess, the experience of the past few years indicates that the figure named is within the range of possibilities. One thing can be said with assurance—that there are many more feeble-minded than most people suppose and that the incalculable harm of inadequate state care for the mentally deficient is only vaguely appreciated. Almost every community in the state has its half-witted young man with dangerous sexual and criminal tendencies or its defective girl who is a prey to every unscrupulous man, or its feeble-minded child, neglected and untaught. In those communities you will hear parents or relatives saying in tones of despair, "I don't know what to do; I have done my best and failed. My child has been on the waiting list at the School for the Feeble-Minded for two years but they have no room."

**The School for the Feeble-Minded is Unreasonably
Crowded. There is a Waiting List and an Increasing
Number of Commitments, Numbering Now 200
for Whom Some Provision MUST be Made.**

The institution at Faribault is crowded with some 1,700 patients, and has been helpless under the pathetic pressure of some five to six hundred applications on the waiting list—many of them applicants of long standing. It should be remembered that people seldom apply until conditions have become almost intolerable, and that many applications are never filed because there is

no prospect of admission. The experience of the Children's Bureau of the State Board of Control shows that for all the voluntary applications, there is at least an equal number of patients who need state care for their own welfare and for the protection of the community. Under the new commitment law there are already approximately two hundred patients formally under the guardianship of the Board of Control and only a few of these have been admitted to Faribault. It is a fair estimate to say that within the next two years the total number of commitments will exceed by five hundred those already made. Part of these committed patients have been previously on the waiting list but not more than forty per cent. Not all of these cases will need institutional care but what shall the Board of Control do with those patients whose condition demands immediate custodial provision? Is the state simply going to ignore the constantly increasing number of committed cases for whom the Board of Control has a direct responsibility which it cannot meet?

**More Than 250 Feeble-Minded Patients are Placed in
State Institutions not Equipped to Care for Them.
They Should be Properly Provided for.**

There is still another phase of the situation worthy of consideration. A survey of our state institutions, aside from the school at Faribault, shows a minimum of 250 persons who are feeble-minded and in need of care and attention other than the kind they are now receiving. A feeble-minded patient is not a proper subject at a state hospital for the insane, yet all the hospitals have such patients. The State School for Dependent Children is conducted for children of normal minds and bodies—yet there are feeble-minded there. Mental deficiency has long been known to have a close relationship to delinquency; it is therefore natural that the Training School

and the Home School should have feeble-minded boys and girls but many of these are too low grade to be benefited there and should be transferred to the proper institution. It is bad economy for Minnesota to retard the legitimate work of its state institutions by forcing them to receive patients whose needs they are not fitted to minister to—nor is this policy fair to the patients; in some cases it is grossly unfair.

It is Unjust and Inhuman to Treat Feeble-Minded and Epileptic Patients in the Same Institution. The Two Classes of Patients MUST be Separated.

By the same sign it is unjust to keep the epileptic patients in the same institution with the feeble-minded, as Minnesota now does. One can only imagine the suffering undergone by a patient, normal save for epilepsy, who finds himself classed with feeble-minded patients. Dr. Kuhlmann has well pointed out not only the injustice to the patient's feelings but that others who need care for epilepsy will not come to a school conducted for both classes of patients. He further discloses that the treatment for epilepsy is a highly specialized matter, calling for special equipment and specially trained persons, and that this provision cannot well be made at a school for the feeble-minded. The present system in Dr. Kuhlmann's judgment is not justified upon any theory or principle. It is the result of pure chance and its continuation is inexcusable.

The Cruelty and Human Waste of an Inadequate State Policy is Demonstrated by Actual Experience.

The correspondence in the files of the State Board of Control is filled with touching appeals. A typical and oft-repeated type is worth noting. The child is seven

years of age but of low grade mentality. He goes to school unwillingly, is mocked and plagued by the other children; he has no friends; cannot mingle with the others, retards the progress of his class and upsets the discipline of the school. At home he is not understood, is regarded as a hopeless burden by all save possibly an overworked but compassionate and loving mother. Then there is the wayward girl, of whom there are so many in city and country alike. She has no inhibitory powers and her parents have little control. She is sexually promiscuous and often diseased, and bears sometimes one, sometimes more children, all of whom are likely to be feeble-minded. She is a menace to the neighborhood, a carrier of disease, and an influence of corruption and degradation. Or take the case of the feeble-minded boy or man who constantly commits petty thefts and who is a potential source of serious harm both to life and property. Occasionally that potentiality is transformed into a reality and the community is shocked by a heinous crime. If one would know what the state pays for its present inadequate and shortsighted policy in not providing for the feeble-minded, let him visit the criminal courts, the charitable hospitals, the insane asylums, the poor houses, brothels and dens of vice,—places where humanity's losses can be reckoned in terms of human life as well as in dollars and cents.

Board of Control Asks for MODEST Increase in Provision for Feeble-Minded by a System of Simple and Inexpensive Colony Care on State Land—Separate Colonies for Feeble-Minded and Epileptic. \$150,000 Needed.

The State Board of Control has long recognized the need for increased provision for the feeble-minded and has consistently urged the matter upon the attention of the legislature. It does not now ask and has not asked

that the state go as far as it should go and must go eventually. This year the recommendation, in view of abnormal conditions, is reduced to meet only the most pressing needs. The board is convinced by the experience of New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and other states that for certain classes of the feeble-minded, simple farm colony care is most desirable, not only because it is much less expensive but because the simplified environment and outdoor life incident to the colony plan are better suited to the needs of the patients. In other states these colonies are located on undeveloped land. Buildings of a plain and inexpensive type and housing from fifty to one hundred patients are erected on a tract of land large enough to provide for rapid expansion. The patients are kept busy clearing the land, preparing it for cultivation and tilling the soil as it is made ready. Such work provides a most wholesome and healthful occupation for the defectives—they are kept busy and happy. Their work enhances the value of the land and the produce of the soil reduces the cost of maintenance. The reports of the Massachusetts School for the feeble-minded at Waverly, the Vineland School of New Jersey, and the Rome State Custodial Asylum of New York show the unquestioned success of the farm colony plan as above outlined. The Board of Control asks the legislature for \$150,000 to build cottages on undeveloped state lands in Northern Minnesota. Two new colonies are planned, one for the feeble-minded and the other for epileptic patients. This will constitute the beginning of a policy of separation for these two classes of patients.

**\$25,000 NEEDED to Care for Emergency Cases and Patients for Whom There is no Room at Institutions
—Parole Supervision and Expert Medical Examiner Provided for.**

The Board is also asking for \$25,000 to be used in caring for feeble-minded patients committed to its

guardianship, where such patients are not in need of institutional care or for whom there is no room at institutions. It is, of course, impossible to place all mental defectives in institutions because of our grossly inadequate facilities. In many instances supervision is the important thing—a system of parole under the watchful care of the state. As long as a patient can be made useful and happy in the community by the addition of supervision, it may be good economy to leave him there. Patients who have been trained and taught useful things at Faribault can sometimes be returned to their homes but the state must still afford supervision and protection. This requires trained workers who are equipped to deal with this handicapped class of people. Moreover, the Board constantly faces the problem of committed cases where there is urgent need of immediate provision of an emergency nature. When this cannot be provided at Faribault, the situation has to be met in another way and the Board must have funds to take proper action. This emergency care is a matter of extreme importance to the community as well as the patient, because the emergency cases are often the most dangerous and harmful to society at large. It is ridiculous to charge the board with guardianship and to leave it without funds to discharge its responsibility. The amount requested for this purpose is far below what even our present needs demand, but it constitutes a beginning. This request will also be made to cover the employment of a psychiatrist to make mental examinations in probate courts and to assist in clinics and before criminal courts. Under the present law the Board of Control has to supply an expert and pay \$5.00 for each examination in feeble-mindedness whenever requested so to do by a probate judge. It would be the part of economy to employ a psychiatrist on full time for this work and for such other work of a kindred nature as time will permit. Here again is a small beginning, pregnant with great future possibilities. Clinics for criminal courts and juvenile courts, general community clinics for de-

fectives, scientific inquiry and study—these will all afford large returns in community protection.

Additional Provision at Faribault School.

For the School at Faribault the Board is asking for an appropriation of \$100,000 for a building to house 150 boys. What has already been said is sufficient to indicate the need for this additional provision.

Imperative Need for Action.

For a long time the State of Minnesota has deferred making adequate provision for the feeble-minded. In some unaccountable way we have either deliberately shut our eyes to the problem or have trusted blindly to chance for protection. Meanwhile the feeble-minded suffer and the community pays the price of short-sightedness a hundred fold. Is there anything before the legislature today of greater importance? Shall good roads and help for returned soldiers, necessary as both are, shut out consideration of things which corrupt the very roots of our human civilization?

APPENDIX.

A detailed statement of recommendations made and appropriations asked for, by the Board of Control, follows.

- Feeble-minded:**
1. Separation of epileptics from feeble-minded.
 2. Establishment of a colony for feeble-minded males and a colony for epileptic males in northern Minnesota on state lands; these colonies to be under the general supervision of the state institution at Faribault; at least, in the beginning.
 3. Appropriation of \$150,000, more or less, for construction purposes, equipment, etc., of two new colonies. Simple buildings to be used. Epileptic colony to house 100. Feeble-minded colony to house 250.
 4. Appropriation of \$25,000 for use of Board in caring for feeble-minded committed to its care, who are not institution cases, or for whom there is no room in institutions. This fund to take care of field work, also, among the feeble-minded as distinct from research work. Two field workers to be regularly employed, one of whom is also to be an expert psychiatrist who could be regularly employed for examinations requested by committing judges. Field work to continue under supervision of the Children's Bureau, as at present.

THE SCHOOL FOR FEEBLE-MINDED.

COTTAGE FOR SCHOOL AND WORKING BOYS..... \$100,000

Authorized by Legislature of 1917 and eliminated from appropriation bill by Governor. Will accommodate 150 boys. If the state is to care for a part of the large number whom it is impossible to admit on account of the crowded condition, it will be necessary to provide additional room. The waiting list contained 496 names on August 1, 1918.

COTTAGE FOR DAIRY BOYS..... \$25,000

Asked for two years ago. The boys employed at the dairy are now living in a temporary shed.

COTTAGE FOR STEWARD..... \$4,000

This is a very large institution and the steward, who in effect is the business manager, should reside on the grounds.

FARM BUILDINGS..... \$11,000

(1) A garden house for the washing and preparation of vegetables, storage for garden tools and equipment, preparation and storage of seeds, etc. The garden now has 75 acres and is without a building.

(2) An addition to the present root cellar, which is wholly inadequate for the large quantity of root crops produced.

(3) Hay sheds which will make it unnecessary to stack hay out-of-doors, with consequent loss.

(4) A slaughter house and meat storage for Wolcott Colony.

BLACKSMITH SHOP..... \$3,000

The present blacksmith shop is so small that work on machinery brought for repairs must be done outside. It is proposed to use the old building for a paint shop. The present paint shop is housed in an old wooden building, so near to the main building that it constitutes a fire hazard, and on that account has been condemned by the State Fire Marshal.

ICE HOUSE, WOLCOTT COLONY..... \$800

The old shed used for this purpose is beyond repair.

FIREPROOFING AND REMODELING MAIN BUILDING... \$66,500

As the building now stands, it is a firetrap and should not be used for the housing of inmates. This amount is asked for the fireproofing of those parts of the building occupied by inmates. Now houses 250.

REMODELING OLD HOUSE, SPRINGDALE..... \$2,000

Provision for officers' quarters has not kept pace with the rapid growth of the institution. This old house is worthless as it stands, but could be remodeled into a useful building.

EXTENSION OF TUNNELS..... \$5,400

To extend service tunnels to Boys' Epileptic Colony and Greenhouse. The heating mains are now laid in the ground and are wasteful of steam.

WATER SUPPLY FOR DAIRY BARN..... \$3,500

The water supply at the dairy is inadequate for domestic purposes and affords no fire protection. For new well, new pump, storage tank with capacity of 2,500 gallons, and installation of 3-inch pipe lines with fire risers, hose racks, reels, etc.

ELECTRIC LINE, GRANDVIEW TO WOLCOTT COLONY. \$3,500

Requested two years ago. To provide this large colony with electric lights and power. Includes pole line three-quarters of a mile long, fixtures for house and barn, and a motor for pumping water and running various kinds of farm machinery.

THERMOSTATIC CONTROL VALVES..... \$3,200

For all bathrooms used by inmates. To afford protection against scalding inmates.

GROUNDS AND FENCING..... \$2,500

\$1,250 yearly, an increase of \$250 a year over amount granted two years ago. For general improvement of grounds.

REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS, HOSPITAL..... \$10,000

Repainting stone and brick work, tile floors and wainscot on fireproof construction in toilet sections of first, second and third floors, operating and sterilizing rooms, repainting all exterior wood and sheet metal work. Also to enable the purchase and installation of an electric elevator for which an appropriation of \$2,000 was granted in 1917, but which cannot be bought for that sum.

REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS, SUNNYSIDE..... \$10,000

New floors, new plumbing fixtures, repairs to roofs, down spouts and gutters, calking windows, repainting stone and brick work, etc. Very bad condition.

REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS, SKINNER HALL..... \$10,000

Pointing brick and stone work, rebuilding chimney tops, repairing and replacing down spouts and gutters, replacing old plumbing, painting exterior wood, sheet metal and iron work, rebuilding old porch floors with cement and providing protective wire screens and fly screens.

REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS, EPILEPTIC COLONY.. \$2,800

Repairing floors, porches and down spouts and gutters, painting, providing suitable coal storage, etc.

REPAIRS AND BETTERMENTS..... \$20,000

\$10,000 yearly, for the general upkeep. Same as previously granted.

HOT WATER PUMPS..... \$1,800

To replace old pumps which are beyond repair.

STERILIZER FOR TUBERCULOSIS HOSPITAL..... \$1,000

Necessary piece of equipment for this building.

CURRENT EXPENSE..... \$590,000

\$290,000 for 1920, \$300,000 for 1921, a total increase of \$45,000 for the period. The average population for the year 1918 was 1,623. The largest state institution in charge of the Board.

Recapitulation.

Cottage for School and Working Boys.....	\$100,000
Cottage for Dairy Boys.....	25,000
Cottage for Steward.....	4,000
Farm Buildings	11,000
Blacksmith Shop	3,000
Ice House, Wolcott Colony.....	800
Fireproofing and Remodeling Main Building.....	66,500
Remodeling Old House, Springdale.....	2,000
Extension of Tunnels.....	5,400
Water Supply for Dairy Farm.....	3,500
Electric Line, Grandview to Wolcott.....	3,500
Thermostatic Control Valves.....	3,200
Grounds and Fencing.....	2,500
Repairs and Improvements, Hospital.....	10,000
Repairs and Improvements, Sunnyside.....	10,000
Repairs and Improvements, Skinner Hall.....	10,000
Repairs and Improvements, Epileptic Colony.....	2,800
Repairs and Betterments.....	20,000
Hot Water Pumps.....	1,800
Sterilizer for Tuberculosis Hospital.....	1,000
Current Expense	590,000

Total \$876,000