

City of Detroit
COMMON COUNCIL

MEL RAVITZ
COUNCILMAN

July
30
1964

Dear

A few weeks ago I sent you a report of a series of meetings on the subject of poverty in our Detroit community. That report contained specific program suggestions for immediate and long range implementation.

In my report I indicated that I would submit these program suggestions to the City's Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) Committee for implementation. To enhance the likelihood of favorable action on our proposals by the TAP Committee, I am inviting you to join me in signing the attached letter.

Please sign the enclosed, stamped postcard and return to me at once. I will wait until Friday, August 7, for your postcard before sending the signed letter with the report to the TAP Committee.

In case you misplaced the basic report, I have enclosed another copy for your review.

Please let me hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Enc. (3)

City of Detroit

COMMON COUNCIL

MIEL RAVITZ
COUNCILMAN

August

7

1964

Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh, Chairman
Total Action Against Poverty Committee
City-County Building
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mayor Cavanagh:

Several weeks ago I convened a series of informal meetings with a number of community leaders to discuss the scope and direction of the campaign against poverty.

At these meetings there was considerable "brainstorming" on the subject of poverty and how to help poor people; many specific proposals were offered. Also, a genuine desire was expressed to do something tangible and meaningful right here in Detroit to alleviate the poverty of too many local citizens.

At these meetings I indicated I would summarize the sessions and record the specific proposals for those who were invited. This I have tried to do in the enclosed report.

All those invited to the meetings have now had a chance to read the report. Those community leaders whose names are listed below join me in presenting this report to the TAP Committee for its consideration and implementation. It is our conviction that these specific program suggestions should be implemented as soon as possible. We are hopeful that this can be done effectively through the TAP Committee. We trust that the Committee will act forthrightly to help the poor people of our community and to eliminate some of the conditions which breed poverty.

Yours sincerely,

(LIST OF CO-SIGNERS)

Enc.

cc: All members TAP Committee

SUMMARY REPORT OF POVERTY MEETINGS

This is a report of a series of four informal meetings I held recently to discuss the subject of poverty in Detroit and how best to eliminate it.

Most participants at these meetings shared a common concern about poverty, as well as a mutual determination to eliminate it. This concern stemmed both from a personal desire to see people living a full, healthful, creative, secure life and from an ideological desire to have our country close the growing gap between the impoverished and the affluent, to prevent formation of an 'underclass' of helpless and hopeless people, to avoid the national disgrace that will come from an inability to assimilate all our people into the pattern of our rich urban industrial way of life.

Although there is much talk about a "war against poverty", it really is not easy for most people to envision poverty. Yet poverty is all around us right here in Detroit in the person of many families which are poor, poorly educated, poorly housed, in poor health. Although \$3,000 has been mentioned as a cut-off limit below which are the poverty stricken, it is clear that no arbitrary figure can be used. Poverty is a condition of income, among other things, that depends on the number of individuals in the family, the extent of their deprivation, the strength of their motivation, the state of their health, the measure of their skill and education. Regardless of what arbitrary dollar figure is used, without question there are millions of impoverished people in America. Many of these people live in Detroit.

There is a deep difference between a "war on poverty" which deals with basic causes, and a campaign to help poor people, which deals with the symptoms of poverty. Though these two different crusades are frequently confused, it is useful to distinguish between them and to stress that both are essential. It won't do simply to attack the social disease of poverty in the abstract and callously to overlook those who are its current victims. Nor will it do to

concentrate on the symptoms of poverty as exhibited by the very real poor people of every community, and yet fail to initiate the fundamental social change necessary to make poverty impossible in our society. Both the causal and the symptomatic approaches are necessary, but we must beware lest a focus on the easier target of helping poor people leads us to forget about the complex economic, social and educational conditions that breed poverty.

Finally, although the war on poverty and to help the impoverished must be launched and sustained at the national and state levels, it is both possible and essential for local communities to gird for their more limited campaigns. Indeed, the chief specific reason for convening this series of meetings was to "brain-storm" as many practical program proposals as possible to move Detroit to the forefront in the poverty campaigns. Although the primary search was for projects Detroit Government could and should initiate, it was hoped that other projects would be suggested that private groups could and would undertake.

This series of meetings was fruitful in producing several specific proposals. Some of these proposals are immediately obtainable, others will require some time to accomplish. Some of them are aimed at basic structural changes, most are concerned with helping poor people right here in our Detroit community. One asterisk (*) has been placed next to those proposals in the following list I believe can and should be implemented without delay; two asterisks (**) highlight the more fundamental structural suggestions.

HEALTH AND FOOD

- *1. Set up free breakfasts for school children in each impoverished school area with surplus foods, donated facilities, volunteer adult workers.
- *2. Re-establish free milk and free lunch programs in schools.
- *3. Institute free, complete, medical and dental examinations in schools with appropriate, enforced referral.

HEALTH AND FOOD (cont'd)

4. Fluoridate water supply to reduce children's dental caries.
5. Free up federal surplus foods to make them more readily available to families that need them; likewise with the food stamp program.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- *1. Use retirees to teach auto mechanics (and anything else possible) to teen age youth, using junk cars on vacant lots. Possibly sell reconditioned cars.
2. Expand tutorial programs, pay tutors, and coordinate all such programs under centralized leadership.
3. Encourage Board of Education to utilize union halls and other neighborhood facilities as more attractive locations than schools in which to teach "drop-outs".
4. Improve skills of those now on low level jobs by on-the-job training in order to upgrade them and open bottom jobs for the less skilled.
5. Establish positions of Education Technician, Counselor Aides, Recreation Assistants and other middle skilled jobs and employ qualified people from the slums if possible to work in schools, on playgrounds, in social agencies, in churches, etc.
6. Establish decentralized, neighborhood based courses in Home Management, Personal and Family Hygiene, Child Care, Consumer Education, etc. Use volunteer teachers from the area whenever possible.
7. Survey available skills in the community and match them with available jobs.
8. Revise school vocational training program to update machines and curriculum.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (Cont'd)

9. Establish widespread pre-school nursery program among the poor to motivate children as early as possible to want to learn and to participate in community life.
10. Intensify education of functionally illiterate people and provide increased occupational opportunities for them.
11. Establish a series of decentralized "store front" libraries in impoverished neighborhoods.
12. Discourage employers from raising educational requirements for unskilled labor, or from establishing higher requirements than necessary.
- *13. Extend low cost school supply program to all schools or set up private low cost school supply stores in impoverished areas.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND SELF HELP

1. Organize the unemployed to dramatize the need for jobs.
2. Establish credit unions among the poor to help them develop monetary knowledge and to avoid the high cost of borrowing.
3. Organize slum residents to encourage intensive housing inspection, enforcement and improvement.
- *4. Establish central, informal sympathetic job information, counseling and referral center.
5. Involve block clubs in locating and helping poor families; effective programs must reach into homes and neighborhoods of the hard to reach.
6. Possibly finance some of these programs on a voluntary basis by collecting pennies at community meetings throughout region. Possible slogans: "It Takes Cents to Make Sense", "Fight Poverty" or "Pennies Against Poverty".
7. Establish a coordinator to match local grass roots needs with available federal money - someone who understands both basic needs and federal programs.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

- **1. Raise the local minimum wage, possibly to \$1.50 per hour.
- **2. Raise wages of presently underpaid workers in many industries.
- **3. Increase categorical assistance on a need basis to mothers, the unemployed, the aged, the disabled, the blind.
- **4. Provide welfare assistance to incapacitated workers, not otherwise assisted.
- 5. Pay qualified welfare workers to assist other poor; use the people of an area as workers and supervisors wherever possible.
- **6. Reduce interest rates, especially on small loans to enable people to borrow inexpensively.

The suggestions above do not exhaust the subject by any means, but they are the most significant of the many ideas that emerged from the informal meetings. Some of these ideas I will attempt to carry out; others will be referred to appropriate agencies. Some of these ideas you will be able to implement from your vantage point.

To implement these and other ideas in our local efforts against poverty and to help the impoverished, I plan, over the next several months, to:

A. Transmit these suggestions to the City's TAP program for implementation.

B. Convene a conference of all those invited to the informal meetings plus others to consider ways and means of carrying out these ideas.

C. Publish a special Newsletter analysing the scope and strategy of efforts to end poverty.