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Frank R. Sennett

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Statement to the Bill of Rights and Public Health, Welfare and Labor
Committee sitting in joint session Thursday, February 3, 1972 -- by Frank
R. Sennett, Deputy Director, Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services

I strongly support the inclusion in our Constitution of inalienable rights to adequate nutrition, decent housing, quality health care and basic social and rehabilitation services.

Individuals enter into a social contract with society under which rights are given both to society and to the individual. Society agrees when it enters into this contract as does the individual to provide and share certain responsibilities and resources. In anarchy each individual takes for himself whatever he can get with no intention of sharing with his fellow human being. In a society bound together by a Constitution and other basic documents and laws each individual agrees to share with those others who have agreed to enter into the same social contact certain resources and rights such as food, shelter, clothing and all other general services and such rights as freedom of speech, etc. The individual agrees to uphold the laws of society and to protect that society to the best of his ability in return for the shared resources and rights.

This contract can be dissolved either unilaterally or mutually if either party refuses or neglects to live up to its part of the agreement.

For too long this country has selectively neglected or refused to recognize its responsibilities in the areas of providing adequate life support for many individuals in this society. This issue is being debated nationally in Congress and in the Courts and legislatures throughout this nation.

There is growing sentiment by those individuals for whom society has adequately failed to provide the most basic life supporting needs that

society no longer has any claims on their loyalties or allegiances. This has resulted in riots, civil disobedience, and the breaking of statutory and often constitutional laws.

This will continue and can destroy this nation unless each and every one of us commits ourselves to sharing the growing prosperity of this nation with our brothers and sisters, our parents, our grandparents, our friends, our neighbors and those whom we do not even personally know, who are suffering because of poverty and lack of access to the services and wealth too many of us take for granted.

I urge you as committee members not merely to pay lip service to this philosophy by including statements in this Constitution, but to put teeth behind those lips that lays the responsibility on state government, all three branches, to see that those statements of philosophy do indeed become fact.

I feel strongly that these rights should not be limited to any special category of people. How can it be said that the child whose family earns \$200 a month is entitled to certain benefits from society and another child whose family makes \$205 a month is not entitled to those same rights. This type of reasoning has no logic nor any humanity.

I will not stand idly by while children grow hungry, their bellies grow huge and their minds become retarded nor will I stand idly by while a family is destroyed, physically and mentally, because one of its members is attacked by a catastrophic illness which puts the family into indentured servitude for the rest of their lives to a hospital and a group of specialists. I cannot tolerate seeing another human being living in a shack with no heat, no plumbing, no beds, and no food. People die in this kind of environment. Children are born deformed or die in their early years. If they survive they detest the society that spawned them and forced them to live as an animal.

I sincerely hope that neither you on these committees nor the rest of this nation can continue to tolerate these survival of the fittest conditions. If you do this society does not deserve to survive.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

Frank R. Sennett, Deputy Director
Social and Rehabilitation Services