

Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services Agency History

The Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services is responsible for the administration of all state and federal financial assistance programs, the Federal Food Stamp and Medicaid Programs. The Department is further responsible for the Children's Services Programs, the administration of Social Service Block Grant (formerly Title XX Programs), and other supportive services.

Cuyahoga County has been involved in caring for dependent and neglected children since **1913** when public funds first became available. The State Board of Charities was given authority to accept commitments of children to be placed in foster homes with the cost to be charged back to the child's county of residence. Local placement and supervisory responsibilities were delegated to the Humane Society.

In **1921**, the County Children's Home Law was amended to permit counties that did not have an existing County Home for Children to appoint a County Child Welfare Board with the power to act directly in placing children in foster homes. Though Cuyahoga County did not immediately take advantage, the county commissioners, at the urging of the Humane Society and the Cleveland Welfare Federation, established a Child Welfare Board late in **1929**, marking the origin of a county agency in Cuyahoga County with the authority to give direct service to dependent and neglected children. The agency had a total caseload of 1,082 children by December of **1930**.

During the course of the **first 15 years**, the Child Welfare Board took over the care of children who were committed to them by Juvenile Court, children voluntarily placed with them by parents or relatives unable to provide adequate care, and sometimes children referred by private agencies who had undertaken care on a short-term basis and discovered that the case would go on longer than was first anticipated.

After **1946**, state law allowed consolidation of relief and welfare functions in county agencies. In **1948**, Cuyahoga County took advantage of this prior change in the state's welfare law and established a permanent County Welfare Department (later Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services) to assist and supervise the county's disabled and disadvantaged. The Welfare Department was established by county commissioners John F. Curry, John J. Pekarek, and Joseph F. Gorman formally acknowledging the county (rather than private agencies, the city, or the state) as responsible for human services. The Welfare Department was charged with administration of the public welfare under sections of the Ohio code (Ohio Revised Code): aid to dependent children and the needy blind, poor relief and burials, emergency aid, and cooperation with state and federal authorities. John J. Schaffer was appointed the first director.

This move placed several types of assistance, previously handled by cities and townships, and the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) Program, previously administered by the

Juvenile Court, under the aegis of the County Welfare Department. In **1952**, the Board of Child Welfare, which had continued as an independent entity, was dissolved and a Child Welfare Division of the County Welfare Department established. The Public Assistance Division retained responsibility for the federally funded categories of relief and general assistance and the Division of Child Welfare continued to work with children removed from their own families and to provide other services to children. As a result of strong recommendation from the community, the Division of Child Welfare added a Protective Services function in **1958**.

In February **1958**, relief cases of the Soldiers' & Sailors' Relief Commission were transferred to the county.

Between **1953-63**, Cuyahoga County experienced a net job loss of 40,000 jobs. During the latter part of this period, however, state welfare payments were reduced, and the state failed to adopt federal improvements to reduce the county's welfare burden and help more destitute persons. State inaction resulted in the loss of more than \$1 million for aged, blind, and disabled aid programs alone.

In **1971**, the federal government mandated that Social Services be separated from Income Maintenance Services, creating an Assistance Payments Division and a Family and Children's Services Division. This federal mandate was directly attributable to the "Great Society" of the mid to late 60's and the economic conditions during the late 60's and the early 70's, both of which combined to cause a significant increase in those in need of public assistance.

In **1972**, the Department of Agriculture introduced major revisions in the Food Stamp Program due to the growing population of low-income employed families in need of nutritionally balanced meals.

The Welfare Department's responsibility with regards to this client population did not end here. The responsibility of providing medical assistance to this same population remained. Due to the major revisions in the Food Stamp Program, the agency was again divided into the Food Stamp Division and the Division of Medical Services with separate eligibility requirements not linked to the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program. As a result, constraints were placed upon the agency to tighten eligibility requirements to be more in line with the federal government's guidelines.

In **1974 and 1975**, Title IV-D of the Social Security Act was mandated. This required applicants of ADC (revised in the 1990's to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or as it was often referred to, TANF) to cooperate in the location of absent parents and enforced that it is a parent's responsibility to make child support payments.

During the same period there was increasing concern regarding fraud among those on public assistance. The result was the creation of still another department, the Investigation and Support Department.

Due to growing concern for accountability and tracking social services, Title XX of the Social Security Act was enacted in **1975**. Title XX created accountability for all services by establishing time limited, goal oriented services. This created an increase in the agency workload due to the accountability necessary to receive the federal dollars for social service programs. The Family and Children's Services Division became the Social Service Division of the Welfare Department during this year.

As a result of national legislation and Ohio code changes, the Welfare Department took on more responsibility, and by **1983** it was the largest county governmental division, with 2,500 employees serving 250,000 residents each month. Functions were later divided into social services (nonfinancial support, such as shelters for the abused, child care, family planning, homemaker services, and alcohol and drug rehabilitation); income maintenance (determination of eligibility for and administration of Supplemental Security Income, Aid to Dependent Children, Title XX funds); and shared services (internally focused planning and training, management, administration, and finance). In **1983** the Welfare Department's operation costs represented 38% of the county's general fund.

On **July 20, 1984**, the Welfare Department was renamed the Department of Human Services. As rules and regulations became more complex, so did state laws mandating additional changes to take place within the welfare system. This further led to litigations and court rulings which created more complexities in administering human services programs.

On **April 14, 1985**, the Jane Edna Hunter Social Services Center at 3955 Euclid Avenue was opened housing most of the county's human services. The Cuyahoga County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) named and dedicated the building to Jane Edna Hunter in honor of her life-long work in the field of social work. In **June 1985**, the Phyllis Wheatley Association, in conjunction with the BOCC, commissioned local artist John Clague to create a sculpture of the late Jane Edna Hunter. The statue was funded by the BOCC, the George Gund Foundation, and the Cleveland Foundation. The sculpture in the lobby stands as a permanent reminder to all of the qualities and rewards of strength, perseverance, and determination exhibited by this local heroine who embodies the helping profession and who has made a significant local and national impact.

As of **July 7, 1992**, the Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services (formerly the Welfare Department) was restructured and divided into five separate and distinctly autonomous departments, each with its own director and each reporting to the Deputy County Administrator for Health and Human Services. Additionally, the Child Support Enforcement Agency was grouped with Human Services Departments as they are on the state level.

The five Departments were known as:

- o Child Support Enforcement Agency
- o Department of Children and Family Services
- o Department of Employment Services
- o Department of Entitlement Services

o Department of Senior and Adult Services

With this restructuring, the main office of the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services remained in the Jane Edna Hunter Center. In **1993** the main office of the Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services was located in the Virgil E. Brown Center at 1641 Payne Avenue. In **later years** this office was moved to the County Administration Building at 1219 Ontario Avenue. A Deputy County Administrator, who reports to the County Administrator, serves as Director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services with management supervisory relationships to these and other county offices and departments which are under the direct jurisdiction of the BOCC.

Ten years later the Departments are known as:

- o Child Support Enforcement Agency
- o Department of Children and Family Services
- o Department of Employment and Family Services
- o Department of Senior and Adult Services

The main office of the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services remains in the Jane Edna Hunter Center at 3955 Euclid Avenue. (2005)