

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL AID ORGANIZATIONS
CONVENTION

Emerson Hotel, September 17, 1941
Baltimore

IT is always a pleasure to bring the greetings of the State of Maryland to a convention with the purposes of which I am personally familiar and in hearty accord. Having watched the growth of legal aid work here in Baltimore for the past twelve years, and after close association with it, both as a lawyer as a State officer, it can be said sincerely that it is a most important and a most valuable cog in the machinery of the administration of justice.

My first interest in the legal aid movement was aroused in 1929 when I was State's Attorney for Baltimore City. That department and the Legal Aid Office were frequently in contact and we were, therefore, in a position to evaluate the necessity and desirability of the work performed by our local Bureau. For instance, one of the members of the staff (in the early days there was only one member of the staff) might call up and explain the social background of a case in which the State's Attorney was interested, and we would then attempt to work out some solution to the problem whereby justice to all concerned, including the State, might be attained.

Or again, a case might come to attention where a lawyer was necessary but where the means to compensate him were not present. Such cases the Bureau would be asked to handle, free of charge, of course. This type of cooperation, mutual helpfulness and humanitarian handling of a criminal case was a pleasant experience for me as State's Attorney.

Later, as Attorney General of Maryland, it was indeed gratifying to note the growth of the movement in this vicinity and to observe that literally thousands of under-privileged people each year were having their legal problems handled for them without charge. Apparently, this tremendous growth is typical of the progress of the legal aid movement throughout the Country, both in number of clients served and in the establishment of new bureaus. It is really an inspiring thing to witness this attendance of people from other states gathered here today to discuss how you may improve your techniques, and how you can benefit by the experience of other communities in rendering even greater services to the poor, to whom the law can seem such a terrifying and such an arbitrary thing.

Also, while Attorney General, it was my privilege to cooperate in the drafting and passage of a number of pieces of social legislation in which the Bureau was interested or which it was actually sponsoring. As Governor, of course, it has been my privilege and pleasure to further and sign a substantial number of bills which were aimed at the betterment of conditions among the humbler classes of society, the necessity for which was brought to public attention by the Legal Aid attorneys and Board members.