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The State Department of Social Services was originally established as the State Department of Public Welfare by Chapter 99, Acts of 1939 to supersede the Board of State Aid and Charities established by Chapter 679, Acts of 1900. By Chapter 148, Acts of 1967, the General Assembly modernized the law, bringing it into conformance with practice and clarifying the responsibilities of the boards and directors of the State and local departments. The Department adopted its present name by Chapter 702, Acts of 1968 (Code 1957, 1964 Repl. Vol., 1969 Supp., Art. 88A, sec. 1).

The State Department of Social Services is the central, coordinating, and directing agency of all welfare activities in the State, including aid to families with dependent children, old age assistance, public assistance to the needy blind, general public assistance, aid to the permanently and totally disabled, child welfare services, and any other welfare activities financed in whole or in part by the State Department of Social Services. It has responsibility for the certification of low income families for medical assistance. In agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, the Department administers the food stamp program, which is available to any locality in the State whose governing body has agreed to provide certain administrative costs.

In Baltimore City and in each county, there is a local department of social services whose directors administer these welfare activities within their respective locality, subject to the supervision, direction, and control of the State Department. Foster care is one of the services administered by the local departments. The State Department exercises supervision over all public and private institutions which have the care, custody or control of dependent, abandoned or neglected children, except those placed by law under the supervision of another agency. It is authorized to establish a central registry of records for the purpose of locating deserting or absent parents of children who are likely, or liable to be, recipients of public assistance or foster care. Each year before the General Assembly convenes, the State Department furnishes to the Governor a report of its activities (Code 1957, 1964 Repl. Vol., 1969 Supp., Art. 88A, secs. 3, 5A, 13, 15, 17).

The State Board of Social Services is composed of nine members appointed by the Governor, one of whom he designates as Chairman. All members serve six-year terms so arranged that three terms expire on June 30 of every second year. The State Board appoints the Director, who appoints the other members of the Department staff, all of which are under the Merit System law. In Baltimore City, the Mayor appoints seven citizens to a welfare commission for staggered six-year terms. The Mayor and the Commissioner of Health serve as ex officio members. In each county, the local governing body appoints the social services board from lists of names submitted by the State Department, after approval by the State Board, containing twice the number of those to be selected. Each of these boards consists of nine members. One of the members must be a member of the local governing body, designated on July 1 of year to serve as the ex officio member of the local social services board. Members of the