

# Should the Welfare System Go Local?

Recently, the House Ways and Means Committee held a hearing about the American welfare system. In the opening statements, Representative Charles Boustany stated:

*“This federal welfare system is large, fragmented, and growing in cost. The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service estimates that we currently operate over 80 programs that provide food, housing, healthcare, job training, education, energy assistance, and cash to low-income Americans.”*

Americans were [warned long ago](#) that such a complicated mess would result if the government became an “administrative system ... to provide for the needs of the poor.” To demonstrate the extensive and confusing nature of the federal welfare system, Boustany presented the flowchart pictured in the screenshot below:



Contrary to popular belief, America’s poor were not left solely to their own devices before the arrival of the modern welfare state. As Grover Cleveland [once noted](#):

*“The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow citizens in misfortune. This has been repeatedly and quite lately demonstrated. Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character, while it prevents the indulgence among our people of that kindly sentiment and conduct which strengthens the bonds of a common brotherhood.”*

By making the welfare of the poor the government's responsibility, have we denied American citizens the opportunity to build and exercise character by helping others? Have we further complicated matters by turning local care and responsibility for the disadvantaged over to the distant federal government?

*Image Credit: U.S. National Archive*