

Relocation Assistance Program in Oklahoma

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The Oklahoma Department of Transportation has been involved in providing relocation assistance benefits and services to thousands of residential, business, nonprofit, and farm-operation relocatees displaced as a result of highway projects during the last 20 years. The program has grown from one of providing mere token advisory assistance to a program that now plays an integral role in the planning process of highway projects as well as in the acquisition of real property.

The state's relocation assistance program is considered a success. This success, however, is not measured by the number of people displaced or the expediency with which this is accomplished, but by the state's ability to minimize the impact and hardships created by a forced displacement. Although the overall objective of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation is to build transportation facilities, the importance of providing humane treatment and understanding for those whose lives and businesses must be disrupted in order to accomplish our objective is recognized. The job of the relocation assistance program is to ensure that each and every individual who is displaced receives the maximum benefits and assistance to which they are entitled. In doing this, the program is governed by federal laws, federal regulations, state laws, and state regulations, all of which deal with providing relocation assistance benefits and services.

It is also known that all these laws, rules, and regulations count very little unless the particular requirements that a relocatee may have or that a business may have are considered on an individual basis in order to minimize this impact. The importance is stressed to relocation agents of presenting a good public-relations image to displacees so that the agent and the program will be accepted and trusted by the displacee, and that the displacee will have every confidence in the state's ability to guide them through this maze of laws, rules, and regulations.

Perhaps the two major areas of shortcomings with the state's program as it now exists are in the areas of (a) excessive federal regulations and (b) the lack of equality for business displacees. In

dealing with the first area of concern, far too often the official positions and decisions that govern all of the relocation assistance programs are made without appropriate consideration for how this really impacts the administration and implementation of a relocation program at the grass-roots level. The relocation assistance program involves working with people in businesses and, as such, there is no way that any agency can adopt rules and regulations that can govern all possible events. The position has been taken for some time now that control of administration and implementation of relocation assistance programs should be left up to those people who are directly responsible for the programs with a minimum of interference and regulations from the federal level. Often these federal regulations, which are intended to protect displacees, eventually end up hurting them.

In looking at the second area, many people recognize the fact that commercial businesses have very little consideration given to them under the relocation assistance program. The fact that you are physically going to move the inventory of a business from point A to point B does very little to help that business, should it be necessary to buy a replacement site or to incur major expenditures in developing the replacement sites to meet their business needs. With all the amendments to the Uniform Act now before Congress, it is a concern that this area of real need has been neglected.

On the whole, anyone who has been involved in the relocation assistance programs from the standpoint of the displacing agency through the displacee has had the benefit of a very good program. While it is very rare that one would meet a displacee who really wants to move, it is always rewarding to look at displacees after they have occupied their replacement dwelling or replacement business site and see that they have assimilated into their new surroundings with a minimum of difficulty. These successful relocations uphold the Uniform Act's declaration of policy, which provides that persons shall not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of programs designed for the benefit of the public as a whole.

Relocation Assistance in New Jersey

Joseph G. Feinberg

Among the more important changes suggested by any assessment of the Uniform Relocation Act are eliminating uneven eligibility requirements that have existed under the Uniform Relocation Act; increasing payments to a level more consistent with today's costs; re-sorting responsibilities for relocation payment between public and private partners in joint projects; and integrating relocation rental assistance with Section 8 rental assistance.

ELIGIBILITY

Of particular importance to those administering

relocation programs in New Jersey has been the need to extend uniform relocation benefits to those displaced through all publicly-assisted programs. New Jersey relocation statutes have always required this but have encountered implementation problems in federally-assisted projects due to conflict with the federal Uniform Relocation Act. The most glaring illustration of this problem has occurred in Section 8--substantial rehabilitation. Where a Section 8 sponsor was a public agency acquiring property for rehabilitation, uniform relocation benefits were awarded. If the sponsor was private and no public acquisition was involved, such benefits were not required. Inasmuch as both types of Section 8