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SURVEY OF CASES CLOSED FROM RELIEF ROLLS FOR  
ADMINISTRATIVE REASONS IN LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

(Study made in November 1935 covering August closings)

February 24, 1936

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Preface

During October and November 1935, a series of special inquiries was conducted in a group of western and southwestern states to study the condition of cases closed from the relief rolls in anticipation of the Works Program and in accordance with the policy of transferring unemployable cases from Federal to state and local care. This group of studies was planned to supplement the information obtained from earlier inquiries into the results of administrative closings in Georgia<sup>1/</sup>.

This series of studies was carried out in about the same manner as the Georgia studies. Background information in each community was secured from relief agency officials and from citizens familiar with the problems of relief. Family interviews were conducted in order to secure primary data bearing on the family composition, the occupational experience of the workers, and the economic status of each household for comparable periods before and after the closings.

Both urban and rural communities

were covered by field surveys. The cities chosen were Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and Little Rock, Arkansas; the rural areas included Custer, Corson, Hand, and Hutchinson Counties in South Dakota, and Kit Carson and Weld counties in Colorado<sup>2/</sup>.

These communities were selected not for the purpose of giving a picture of conditions prevailing generally in the United States but because they show clearly certain kinds of problems. Their value in giving direction to future administrative policy is increased by the fact that they display diverse conditions. Two of the studies--those in Colorado and Arkansas--cover only unemployable cases and hence throw light upon the problems confronting the state and local agencies that are assuming the care of such cases. The two South Dakota inquiries, including only employable cases, yield information upon the significance of harvesting work in relation to the relief rolls and upon the problems involved in adjusting the Works Program to meet the needs of these people.

<sup>1/</sup> See Research Bulletins Series II No. 8; Series I, No. 11; and C-19.

<sup>2/</sup> See Research Bulletins Series II No. 11; Series II, No. 12; Series II No. 13.

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SUMMARY

This study presents an analysis of the condition of a group of households--classified as unemployable--in Little Rock, Arkansas, before and after their transfer from Federal to state care. The average income of \$11.76 in July 1935, the last month of Federal care, declined to an average of \$7.01 per household in October. The change reflects primarily decreases in the amount of public assistance, since income from private employment and assistance from private sources were of negligible importance. This 40 percent reduction seriously affected the families involved: the number and quality of meals were reduced to the point where about one-half of those interviewed were unable to obtain more than one or two meals daily; housing conditions already had become worse; families unable to pay rent were sometimes evicted, and destitution and suffering were intensified.

Of the cases studied, less than one-half were white; two-thirds of the group were individuals living alone; most of them were either senile or afflicted with disease. Some were bedridden and a few were blind. Data which they gave regarding their

occupational history revealed that the large majority had been unskilled workers when last employed at their usual occupations; and that average weekly wages earned at that time ranged from \$5.00 for Negro female workers to \$21.00 for white males. A low standard of education was found to be common in this group; only twenty-one had gone to high school, and thirty-eight were illiterate. A long relief history averaging 17 months for the white group and 19 months for the Negroes featured this record.

The recently enacted Public Welfare Act of Arkansas became operative in June 1935, but during the period covered by the study the Public Welfare Commission was occupied mainly with problems of organization and with the registration of those eligible for old age pensions, so that but little assistance had been granted under the terms of the act.

On April 1, 1935, an old age pension act was passed by the state, but no funds had been made available for its administration up to November 15. The provision of such funds would give assistance to many of the cases included in this study.

SURVEY OF CASES CLOSED FROM RELIEF ROLLS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE  
REASONS IN LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS, IN AUGUST 1935

In August 1935, nearly 500 cases in Little Rock, Arkansas, were transferred from E.R.A. relief to the care of the recently created Public Welfare Commission of the state. The families transferred consisted of cases classified as unemployable<sup>1/</sup> who were being shifted from Federal to state care in accordance with policies outlined by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. One third of this number (149 cases) were selected at random as a group from which the information for this study was obtained by home interviews, after all pertinent data available at the relief offices had been utilized.

Composition and Characteristics  
of Households

Of the households selected for interviews, less than one-half were white, a proportion not very different from that found in the total relief population in this city (Table I). Over two-thirds of the group were individuals living alone. In the families of the remaining households, 74 dependents--wives and children--were reported. In 91 cases or 61 percent of the total, the heads were 65 years of age or over (Table II).

<sup>1/</sup> The Arkansas Public Welfare Act defines unemployable persons as follows: An unemployable under the Public Welfare Act is one who is physically or mentally incapable of making a living at available employment. In no case shall one who is physically and mentally capable of performing manual labor be eligible for relief under this act.

Most of those not too old to work were either physically disabled or suffering from disease (Table III). Heart disease, rheumatism and nephritis were the diseases most frequently reported. Others, suffering from diseases chronic in character, were often bedridden and without medical care. This fact was brought out by the answers to the interviewers' questions as to the most urgent needs of individual clients. Medical attention was mentioned in 34 instances. It is known that the case worker in the district had made calls on certain of these households to arrange for medical care, but her burden of work was such as to make it impossible to cover effectively all the families under her care. Those unable to walk could not always take advantage of medical care arranged for them, nor could those that lacked carfare or means for other transportation.

A large majority (93) of the heads of households had been unskilled workers, chiefly common laborers or domestics; of the others, 18 had been classified as skilled workers and 20 persons reported that they had been non-manual workers, with salesmen most numerous among this latter class (Table IV).

Average weekly earnings at their last private job in their usual occupation (in the period 1925-30 for most cases) ranged from \$5.00 for Negro female workers to \$21.00 for white males. It should be borne in mind that the group showing the lowest rate was almost entirely made up of domestics--maids, cooks, laundresses, etc.--occupations which are traditionally low paid.

Only 21 of the heads of households stated they had attended high school. At the other end of the scale it was found that in 38 instances, or over 25 percent of the total, heads of households were reported to be unable to read or write English; all but one of these 38 were Negroes (Table V).

On the average, the Negro group had received relief for a period of 19 months; the corresponding period for the white group was 17 months (Table VI). In view of the fact that three-fifths of the persons covered in this study were 65 years of age and over (and whose employment history ended some time ago), it is not surprising that more than one-half of them had a relief history prior to June 1933, the date when E.R.A. came into existence.

#### Comparison of Incomes During July and October

In July 1935, the last month when E.R.A. relief was received by this group, the average total income per household amounted to \$11.76 (Table A, page 3). Three months later, for the month of October, the average income for the same group had dropped 40 percent to \$7.01 (Table B page 3).

The reduction in the income of the Negro households during this period amounted to 58 percent, that of the white households, 29 percent.

Family incomes in the main consisted of relief grants of grocery orders and surplus commodities. A very few cases received small cash incomes<sup>2/</sup> from odd jobs and from

<sup>2/</sup> Five cases received such income and the total amount fell short of \$7.00.

such other sources as contributions by friends and relatives. The majority of families, however, had no cash income to cover expenditures for clothing, medical care, and incidental household or personal needs.

Of the 149 households visited, only 36 reported debts. Seven of these were white families and 23 were single Negroes. Amounts reported were small and consisted principally of rent, grocery, and doctors' bills. The average debt of the group was \$4.74. (The debts of these households ranged from an average of \$16.25 for white households of two or more persons down to \$3.83 the average for the group of single Negroes.) It is to be presumed that families who have been on relief for approximately a year and a half would have little chance of obtaining credit.

#### Housing and Rent

Housing conditions were found to be extremely unsatisfactory. Interviewers frequently reported houses in bad state of repair. This was especially true of homes occupied by families paying no rent, who were often provided with shelter through the generosity of friends, relatives former employers, and landlords. Shanties, garages, and condemned commercial buildings were sometimes used for living quarters. Evictions because of inability to pay rent were not infrequent<sup>3/</sup>. Improvements such as running water, gas, and electricity were entirely lacking in 57 homes. The average monthly rental for families paying rent was \$5.45 (Table VII).

<sup>3/</sup> In some instances, where eviction was threatened, payment of rent was made by the Public Welfare Commission.

Table A. Incomes of 149 Relief Households From All Sources<sup>a/</sup> in July,  
Classified by Size of Household and Race

Income	Total households	Size of Household		Race	
		One person	Two or more persons	White	Negro
Total	149	104	45	64	85
\$ .01 - 2.99	5	5	-	1	4
3.00 - 5.99	20	19	1	6	14
6.00 - 8.99	21	21	-	3	18
9.00 - 11.99	31	21	10	16	15
12.00 - 14.99	26	19	7	7	19
15.00 - 17.99	18	7	11	13	5
18.00 - 20.99	4	1	3	4	-
21.00 - 23.99	6	2	4	5	1
24.00 - 26.99	1	-	1	1	-
27.00 - 29.99	2	1	1	1	1
30.00 and over	5	-	5	3	2
Incomplete records	10	8	2	4	6
Average (median)	\$11.76	\$10.00	\$16.23	\$14.57	\$10.30

a/ Including surplus commodities.

Table B. Incomes of 149 Relief Households From All Sources<sup>a/</sup> in October,  
Classified by Size of Household and Race

Income	Total households	Size of Household		Race	
		One person	Two or more persons	White	Negro
Total	149	104	45	64	85
\$ .01 - 2.99	8	8	-	1	7
3.00 - 5.99	54	53	1	18	36
6.00 - 8.99	37	19	18	10	27
9.00 - 11.99	16	8	8	7	9
12.00 - 14.99	10	2	8	9	1
15.00 - 17.99	9	6	3	8	1
18.00 - 20.99	5	2	3	5	-
21.00 - 23.99	2	1	1	2	-
24.00 - 26.99	2	-	2	2	-
27.00 and over	1	-	1	-	1
Incomplete records	5	5	-	2	3
Average (median)	\$7.01	\$5.49	\$10.31	\$10.29	\$5.96

a/ Including surplus commodities.

One case may be cited as indicative of the worst housing conditions encountered. A woman, 72 years of age, was found living in a three-room house with a badly damaged roof. One room was used for storing wood, a second was not utilized, and the third one, which served as living quarters, was bare of furniture. She used a box for a chair and slept on the floor. The missing door was replaced by a sack. The roof leaked badly.

Twenty-one householders owned homes having estimated values ranging between \$100 and \$2,000. Two-thirds of the home owners were Negroes. Mortgages were reported in four instances, and six households stated they were in arrears in the payment of taxes.

#### Diet

Information obtained from the 149 families regarding diets during the last three days before the interviews revealed that only 53 households reported three meals a day. A group of 62 families found it necessary to restrict the number of meals to an average of two a day, while another group of 14 households reported only three meals in three days. Nearly two-thirds of all households reported a decrease in the quantity of such foods as milk, meat staples, fresh vegetables, and canned goods. A number of them reported that during July, milk and meat were regularly included in their daily fare; these commodities had almost completely disappeared from their diet in October.

When questioned concerning their most urgent immediate needs, over one-third of the households mentioned food. Some of them requested

food from the interviewers. "We eat much less now and wish we had more", or "If I only had money of my own to buy some food", were statements frequently heard. In most instances, the diet was insufficient in quantity and inadequate in important nutritive essentials.

#### Activities of Past Week

During the week preceding the home interviews, only a third of the heads of households spent much time outside their own homes. The chief activities they reported were "seeking work", and "visiting". Six stated that they had been busy street peddling, three did a few odd jobs and four others had been out begging.

#### State Provisions for Public Welfare and Old Age Pensions

State-wide welfare work under state supervision was established in June 1935, when the Public Welfare Act of Arkansas became operative; during the period covered by the study, the Public Welfare Commission was occupied mainly with problems of organization and with the registration of those eligible for old age pensions, so that but little assistance had been granted under the terms of the act.

In addition to some 500 families on the relief rolls in Little Rock at the present time, 300 more are reported to be eligible for assistance. Unless larger allocations are made from state funds, family grants will become still smaller as this additional load is assumed.

About three-fifths of the families studied had heads who were 65 years of age or over. The majority of these persons would probably be

eligible for an old age pension. Arkansas recently enacted such a law, but up to November 15, 1935 no funds had been set aside for administration of the act. Transfer of those persons eligible for care under the

Old Age Pension Act from the rolls of the Public Welfare Commission would considerably lighten the burden of that agency and make possible more adequate assistance for the remainder of the group.



Table I. Heads of 149 Relief Households Classified by Race and Sex and by Number of Persons in Household

Race and sex	Total households	One person households	Two or more person households
All races	149	104	45
Male heads	85	58	27
Female heads	64	46	18
White	64	40	24
Male heads	40	26	14
Female heads	24	14	10
Negro	85	64	21
Male heads	45	32	13
Female heads	40	32	8

Table II. Age Distribution of Heads of 149 Relief Households Classified by Race

Age distribution	Total	White	Negro
All ages	149	64	85
18 - 24 years	3	1	2
25 - 34 "	3	1	2
35 - 44 "	7	3	4
45 - 54 "	17	8	9
55 - 64 "	28	17	11
65 - 74 "	58	21	37
75 - 84 "	29	11	18
85 years and over	4	2	2

Table III. Disabilities of Heads of 149 Relief  
Households Classified by Race

Disability	Total	White	Negro
All disabilities	149	64	85
Senility	33	14	19
Heart disease	16	7	9
Rheumatism	16	4	12
Nephritis	10	4	6
Crippling injury	9	4	5
High blood pressure	7	-	7
Mental defective	7	3	4
Asthma	6	2	4
Total blindness	6	1	5
Paralysis	6	4	2
Hernia	5	5	-
Cancer	5	3	2
Other disabilities	18	11	7
Not ascertainable	5	2	3

Table IV. Former Regular Occupations of Heads of  
149 Relief Households Classified by Race

Occupation	Total	White	Negro
Total	149	64	85
Skilled work	18	12	6
Carpenter	5	2	3
Painter	3	3	-
Blacksmith	4	4	-
Other skilled	6	3	3
Unskilled work	93	26	67
Farm laborer	9	2	7
Laborer	44	17	27
Domestic servant	34	2	32
Other unskilled	6	5	1
Non-manual work	20	15	5
Salesman	10	7	3
Other non-manual	10	8	2
Housewives	15	10	5
Not ascertainable	3	1	2

Table V. Education of Heads of 149 Relief Households  
Classified by Race

Number of grades completed	All heads	White	Negro
Total, all grades	149	64	85
None	42	6	36
1 - 2 grades	11	3	8
3 - 4 "	22	10	12
5 - 6 "	18	10	8
7 - 8 <sup>a</sup> "	29	14	15
9 - 10 "	9	6	3
11 - 12 "	11	8	3
Over 12 grades	1	1	-
Not ascertainable	6	6	-

a/ Twenty in this group (11 whites, 9 Negroes) had completed eight grades.

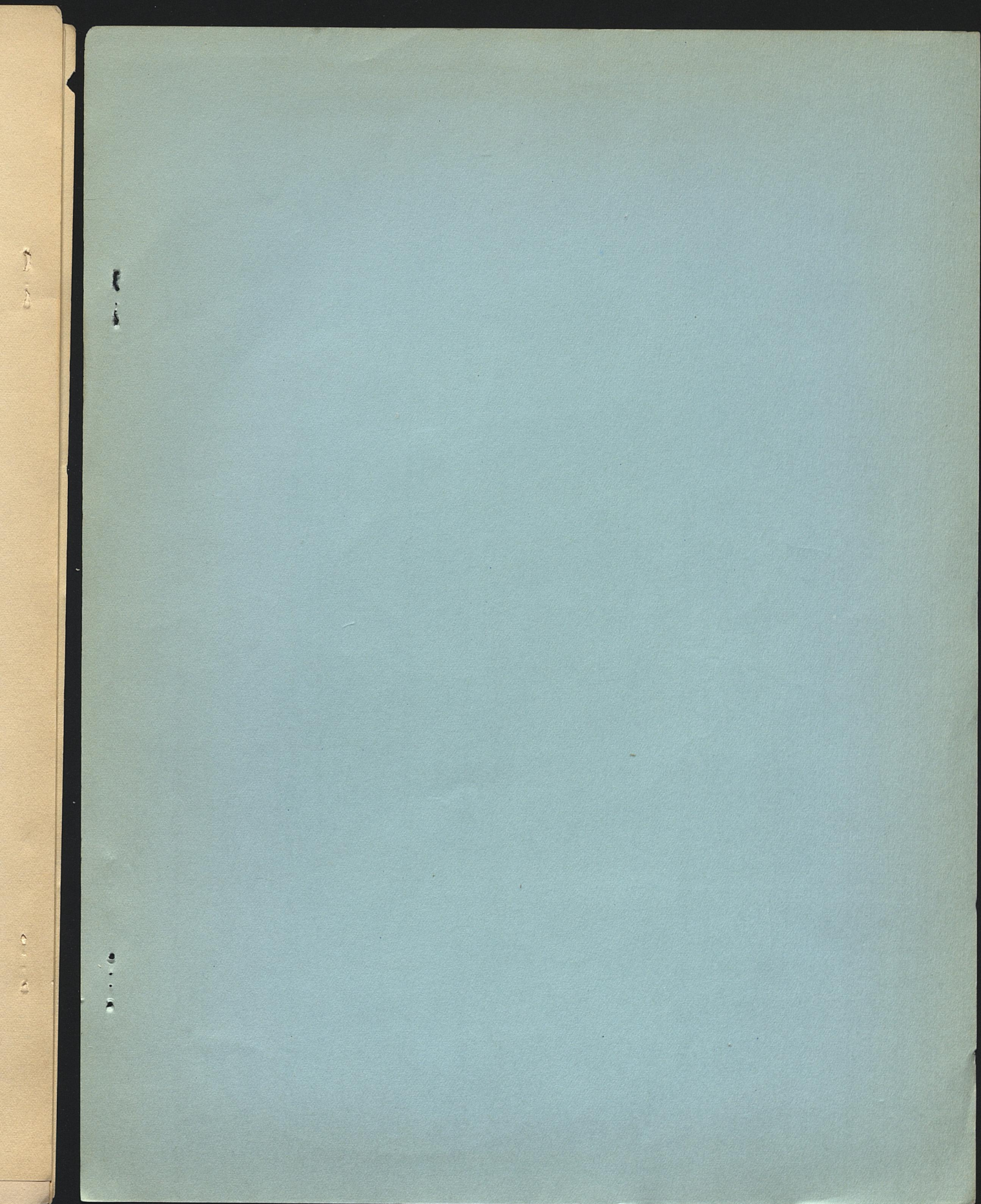
Table VI. Duration of E.R.A. Relief  
for 149 Cases Classified by Race

Duration of relief	Total	White	Negro
Total, all periods	149	64	85
1 - 5 months	8	4	4
6 - 10 "	15	8	7
11 - 15 "	29	13	16
16 - 20 "	35	14	21
21 - 25 "	29	11	18
26 months and over	30	11	19
Not ascertainable	3	3	-
Average relief period in months	18	17	19

Table VII. Monthly Rentals of Quarters Occupied by  
128 Relief Households Classified by Race

Rentals	Total	White	Negro
Total, all rentals	128	57	71
No rent	46	21	25
\$ .01 - 1.99	4	1	3
2.00 - 3.99	15	5	10
4.00 - 5.99	40	16	24
6.00 - 7.99	10	4	6
8.00 and over	11	10	1
Not ascertainable	2	-	2
Average <sup>a/</sup> (arithmetic mean)	\$5.45	\$6.58	\$4.55

a/ Based only on households paying rent.



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