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The Administration of Municipal Legal Services: The Chicago Law Department, by Robert W. Siebenschuh

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THE ADMINISTRATION OF MUNICIPAL LEGAL SERVICES:—
The Chicago Law Department, By Robert W. Siebenschuh. Public Administration Service, Publication No. 82. 1942. 31 p. \$1.50.

This study of the reorganization of the Department of Law of the City of Chicago was prepared by Robert W. Siebenschuh and published by the Public Administration Service of Chicago, Illinois. It describes the functions of the legal department of a large city government, the nature of the Chicago legal system prior to reorganization, the present organization and management of the department, and some possibilities for future reforms.

The functions of a large city legal department fall mainly into four groups. The giving of legal advice is a function which involves determining the scope of municipal power under the charter and statutes and translating that power into desirable and legal action. Another primary function is that of looking after the city's interest in litigation. This involves both initiating and defending civil actions,

backing up city enforcement officials by prosecuting violators of the city laws, and representing the municipalities in hearings before administrative boards and regulatory bodies. A third task of a municipal legal branch is that of expanding municipal powers by lobbying at the state capitol and following litigation in which the issues are of interest to the city. The fourth function is that of policy making. The legal department must determine the bounds within which the city's policies are by law confined.

Before the reorganization there were six separate municipal agencies supplying legal services for the City of Chicago. As new phases of city government had developed to meet new conditions, new legal agencies had been created. On August 2, 1935, this confusion was brought into order by a city ordinance which consolidated all previous legal offices into a single Department of Law headed by the Corporation Counsel. The divisions of the present Department are of two types. The line divisions are General Counsel, Torts, Appeals and Review, Ordinance Enforcement, and Public Improvements. The auxiliary divisions are Administrative, Research, and Investigation.

The Department is highly centralized with all authority and responsibility concentrated in the person of the Corporation Counsel. The nerve centers of management are found in the offices of the Corporation Counsel, and of the division chiefs. To insure that certain standards of work are met, a system of departmental control through administrative reports has been established.

The problem of a personnel program is the "Achilles' heel of the Department." By state law the Chicago Law Department is exempt from civil service requirements, and there is no compulsory merit system in operation. The fact that the majority of appointments to the staff of the Department are made through the patronage system has worked against the achievement of a positive personnel program. However, recognition of this fact should not obscure the fact that it required both courage and foresight to undertake even a limited personnel program in a department having such a history.

Establishment of a fact-finding unit, the Research Division, in the Chicago Law Department was a pioneering venture in the field of municipal law practice. It has had purely a staff function—to supply the social, administrative, and economic information necessary to the solution of legal problems.

It is obvious that the reorganization of the Chicago Law Department has resulted in the production of markedly improved legal work, and it is to be expected that progress will continue. The problems still confronting the Department are principally concerned with consolidating the administrative gains already made, tightening up the strictly organizational features of the Department, and addressing serious consideration to personnel. The last of these three is the most basic.

The experience in Chicago will be helpful to a majority of the large cities in Indiana.