SENATE...No. 101.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Hon. J. E. Field, President of the Senate:

SIR,—In compliance with an Order of the Senate, adopted on the tenth inst., asking me for “facts that may have come to my knowledge, in the discharge of the duties of my office, in regard to suffering alleged to exist in the families of Massachusetts soldiers, in consequence of the neglect or refusal of the municipal authorities to pay State aid in cases where it was justly due,” I respectfully,

REPORT:

The Acts in regard to State aid to families of volunteers do not directly grant an appeal from the decision of the municipal authorities to the State auditor; yet as the statute requires returns to be made to this department, by cities and towns, of all aid furnished, and also further provides that “no reimbursement shall be made from the State treasury until such report has been carefully examined, scrutinized, and approved by said auditor,” it has become the practice to refer all doubtful cases to this office in order to ascertain what payments will be allowed.
These cases are presented in person or by letter and will average from thirty to forty per week. They are all carefully examined, the papers presented are compared with the rolls and with the past returns from the cities and towns and then a decision is made; and in no instance since the war commenced has it ever come to my knowledge that municipal authorities have refused the aid where a good case was made out. The trouble has been that the city and town authorities have been too willing to pay away the money of the State, and many parties not entitled to aid have received it from cities and towns, and these items when presented at this office for allowance have been rejected.

In order to secure uniformity as far as possible in the allowance of aid, circulars have been prepared by this department, from time to time, giving explanations in regard to these laws, and the rules and regulations that would govern the auditor in allowing the accounts returned by the cities and towns. These, after being approved by the attorney-general, have been distributed throughout the Commonwealth. In this way, and by numerous decisions, the construction placed upon these Acts by the authorized legal adviser of the department has now become generally known and followed by the authorities in the discharge of their duties.

There is a class of sturdy mendicants, pertinacious in their applications, that have no just claim for aid, who are constantly annoying municipal officers, and when disappointed in their designs, apply to the executive or legislative branch of the government for help. Cases of this kind, and some of a more respectable class, have been presented at the present session, and the fact that they have in every instance had leave to withdraw, is a proof, that their claims are not believed to rest on any good foundation.

Some delay has occurred in the cases of parties who enlist in Massachusetts regiments from other States, on account of the fact that many of them were not credited to any particular city or town, but to the State at large. These cases are now being assigned to the separate towns, and when so assigned, in no case has aid been refused where proper vouchers have been presented.
There is also a class of agents who do not understand, or purposely misrepresent our State aid laws, and thereby induce parties to apply for aid who have no just claim, making much trouble to the authorities, and disappointment to themselves.

The foregoing are the "facts as they have come to my knowledge." I have given no instances of "suffering in the families of Massachusetts soldiers in consequence of the neglect or refusal of the municipal authorities to pay State aid, in cases where it was justly due," because I have never heard of any, nor do I believe that any exist; and while some, I have no doubt, are wrongfully paid, I do not believe the aid is unjustly withheld.

Respectfully submitted,

LEVl REED, Auditor.