MEMORANDUM TO THE CONFERENCE:

I have now had an opportunity to review carefully the memoranda circulated by our two "Bills". Both are impressive and persuasive memos. As I think either could form the basis of a principled decision, I have found the case particularly troublesome. In any event, being satisfied that further delay will not make decision any easier, I will now firm up the tentative view to reverse that I expressed at Conference. I add the following observations.

As to the legislative history debate, I am persuaded that Bill Douglas' reading of it in Monroe was wrong. Bill Rehnquist's memorandum makes a reasonable argument in favor of Monroe's interpretation of the Sherman Amendment's rejection. In my view, however, the Sherman Amendment was an attempt to impose vicarious liability on government subdivisions for the consequences of private
lawlessness. The legislative history can best be understood as limiting the statutory ambit to actual wrongdoers, i.e., a rejection of respondeat superior or any other principle of vicarious liability.

I have had some doubt that the word "person" was intended to include inanimate bodies. Its use is hardly an artful way to include municipalities or similar entities. Yet, I suppose the "plain meaning" approach was eroded long ago. There is the so-called "Dictionary Act," passed a month before the Civil Rights bill was introduced, which indicates a congressional understanding that "the word 'person' may extend and be applied to bodies politic and corporate. . . ." Act of Feb. 25, 1871, ch. 71, §2, 16 Stat. 431. While "an allowable not a mandatory" definition, Monroe, 365 U.S., at 191, it is evidence of special usage of the term "person". Moreover, I was painfully reminded only a few weeks ago that a majority of my Brothers thought the same word, used by Senator Sherman in 1890, included foreign governments, Pfizer, Inc. v. Government of India, No. 76-749 (decided January 11, 1978), as well as municipalities, Chattanooga Foundry & Pipe Works v. City of Atlanta, 203 U.S. 390, 396 (1960). With me, other considerations weigh more heavily than an attempt to read decisive meaning into speeches by members of Congress a century ago or speculation whether
the word "person" embraces the universe. Everyone agrees that §1983 authorizes suits against officials of governmental units both in their official and individual capacities. If one assumes that the municipality generally will indemnify an official sued for conduct within the scope of his authority, as it must if it is to attract and retain competent officers, board members and employees, it really does not matter which way one goes on the fiscal-impact argument. The municipality pays in either event.

In addition we have enshrined the fiction that allows mandatory injunctions, requiring the expenditure of large sums of money, in §1983 actions, e.g., Milliken v. Bradley, 97 S.Ct. 2749 (1977), at the same time that we proscribe recovery of damages. While the Eleventh Amendment requires application of the fiction to suits against the States, I am not inclined to extend it to suits against local governments. Local governments probably already bear the financial burden of 1983 suits, for damages as well as injunctive relief. Bill Rehnquist does make an arguable point when he suggests that juries may be more likely to escalate damages if a local government itself is named as a defendant. I am not sure, however, that the average juror would view his or her local government or school board in the same light that jurors view insurance companies and railroads. After all, most jurors are taxpayers.
This brings me to what I suppose is the most troublesome aspect of a reversal in this case: its effect on the doctrine of stare decisis. To my mind, considerations of stare decisis cut in both directions. On the one hand, we have a series of rulings that municipalities and counties are not "persons" for purposes of § 1983. In the somewhat accidental manner that characterizes many of our § 1983 decisions, cf. Runyon v. McCrary, 427 U.S. 160, 186* (1976), we have answered a question that was never briefed or argued in this Court — whether a municipality is liable in damages for injuries that are the direct result of its policies. The claim in Monroe was that the City of Chicago should be held "liable for acts of its police officers, by virtue of respondeat superior," Brief for Petitioners, O.T. 1960, No. 39, p. 21, namely, a warrantless, early morning raid and ransacking of a Negro family's home. Although Morris

1. Respondents' brief in Monroe identified the implications of petitioner's position for the municipalities of the nation:

"If this court ... adopts petitioners' theory that the act of respondent Pape, no matter how wrongful and how violative of the Constitution and laws of Illinois and the ordinances of Chicago, binds Chicago and makes it directly liable therefor, then Chicago and every other municipality in the United States is open to Civil Rights liability through no action of its own and based on action contrary to its own ordinances and the laws of the state it is a part of." Brief for Respondents, supra, p. 26.

No attempt was made, however, to relate these concerns to the rejection of the Sherman Amendment.
Ernst's brief for petitioners in *Monroe* contains a footnote discussion of the Sherman Amendment, he had no incentive to present a view of the legislative history that would have foreclosed relief on a theory of *respondeat superior*.

In *Moor v. County of Alameda*, 411 U.S. 693 (1973), the only other relevant case presenting a substantial discussion of the legislative history of § 1983, petitioners asserted that "the county was vicariously liable for the acts of its deputies and sheriff," *id.*, 696, under § 1988. Although we reaffirmed explicitly *Monroe*'s reading of the debates over the 1871 Act, petitioners in that case did not challenge "the holding in *Monroe* concerning the status under § 1983 of public entities such as the County." *Id.*, at 700. Technically, the holding of *Moor* does not extend beyond the recognition that "Congress did not intend, as a matter of federal law, to impose vicarious liability on municipalities for violations of federal civil rights by their employees," and that §1988 "cannot be used to accomplish what Congress clearly refused to do in enacting § 1983." *Id.*, at 710 & n. 27.

Only in *City of Kenosha v. Bruno*, 412 U.S. 507 (1973), did the Court confront a § 1983 claim based on conduct that was both authorized under state law and directly -- rather than vicariously -- responsible for the claimed constitutional injury. But in *Kenosha* we raised the jurisdictional question on our own initiative. Thus,
the issues identified in the scholarly exchange between Bill Brennan and Bill Rehnquist simply have not been thoughtfully ventilated on any previous occasion.

On the other hand, affirmance in this case requires a rejection of this Court's sub silentio exercise of jurisdiction over school boards in a great many cases. As Bill Rehnquist acknowledges, at least three of these decisions involved claims for monetary relief, Cleveland Bd. of Educ. v. LaFleur, 414 U.S. 632 (1974); Cohen v. Chesterfield County School Board, 414 U.S. 632 (1974); Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Community School Dist., 393 U.S. 503 (1969); also Vlandis v. Kline, 412 U.S. 441 (1973). There was an independent basis of jurisdiction in these cases because of the joinder of individual public officials as codefendants. But the opinions of this Court often made explicit reference to the school-board party, particularly in discussions of the relief to be awarded, see, e.g., Green v. County School Board, 391 U.S. 430, 437-439, 441-442 (1968). And Congress has focused specifically on this Court's school-board decisions in several statutes. The exercise of § 1983 jurisdiction over school boards, even if not premised on considered holdings, thus has been longstanding. Indeed, it predated Monroe.

In my view, reversal would require the overruling only of Kenosha. I would simply limit Monroe and Moor to
their facts. The preclusion of governmental liability for
the tortious conduct of individual officials that was
neither mandated nor specifically authorized by, and indeed
was violative of, state or local law, is consistent with
the 42d Congress' rejection of vicarious liability as an
operative principle of the 1871 Civil Rights Act.

The rationale of Kenosha may have to be disturbed
in some fashion, whichever course the Court follows in this
case. Acceptance of Bill Rehnquist's view would require,
if I understand him correctly, importing into §1983 the
approach of Ex parte Young, 209 U.S. 123 (1908), to
preserve the availability of injunctive relief. While this
is an understandable position, it does entail a "bifurcated
application [of §1983] to municipal corporations depending
on the nature of the relief sought against them." 412 U.S.,
at 513. A public official sued in his official capacity,
congedly a "person" for purposes of injunctive relief,
would become a non-"person" in a suit seeking a monetary
recovery.

Moreover, under Bill's approach, I suppose we
would have to say that Congress rejected the Sherman
Amendment because it "wished to preserve the financial
capacity of municipalities to carry out basic governmental
functions" and "to insure the security of businessmen who
traded with them." Our previous decisions have not
identified these concerns as the principal reasons for the
defeat of the Sherman proposal. Indeed, such considerations were minimized in Kenosha itself, which held that a municipality could not be sued for injunctive relief under §1983 even though no monetary award was sought because a municipality is simply not a "person."

I have concluded that the prior decisions in this area do not require application of the usual stare decisis principle. There is no coherence in the relevant body of precedents. Indeed, there is a degree of confusion in principle that we now have an opportunity to rationalize.

Although, as indicated, I generally agree with Bill Brennan, I differ with his memo in two respects. First, Monroe and Moor should be restricted to their facts, rather than overruled. The Court simply could say that we have had no occasion previously to consider the availability of a §1983 damages remedy for constitutional violations that are the direct result of a policy decision by the government entity, rather than a failure to curb the unauthorized torts of its employees. See Rizzo v. Goode, 423 U.S. 362, 377 (1976) (discussing Swann and Brown). There are substantial line-drawing problems, as Bill Rehnquist notes, but this case involves a formal, written policy of the municipal department and school board. It is the clear case.

Second, I would recognize a defense for policies promulgated in good faith that affect adversely

One further thought: We see decisions increasingly that extend the Bivens rationale to state action. Lawyers apparently have gotten "the word" and complaints are being framed both under §1983 and directly under the Fourteenth Amendment. See, e.g., Lowell School Dist. No. 71 v. Kerr, No. 77-688, March 3, 1978, Conference. We will not be able much longer to avoid confronting the question whether, Congress having provided relief (through §1983) for state action, parties nevertheless are free to by-pass §1983 and to rely on federal question jurisdiction to sue municipalities for alleged Fourteenth Amendment violations. I do not know how I would answer this question, but I suppose we would retain greater flexibility under §1983 to make distinctions between claims of constitutional dimension and those that are not, than we would if Bivens-type remedies become generally available in state action cases. If we continue
to deny §1983 relief against local governmental units, we strengthen the argument for Bivens relief. I would prefer to avoid this pressure.

I am grateful to both "Bills" for their most helpful contributions to our deliberations in this case.

L.F.P., Jr.
February 23, 1978

No. 75-1914, Monell v. Dept. of Soc. Services

Dear Chief,

In light of Lewis Powell's memorandum of today, might it not be a good idea to discuss this case at our Conference tomorrow?

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

The Chief Justice

Copies to the Conference
MEMORANDUM TO THE CONFERENCE

Re: 75-1914 - Monell v. Dept. of Social Services

Like Lewis, I found the two memoranda especially valuable. I am persuaded by Bill Brennan that Monroe misconstrued the actual intent of Congress on the question whether a municipality can be a person. Until I received Lewis' memorandum this afternoon, I was persuaded by Bill Rehnquist's discussion of stare decisis that we should probably not overrule the Monroe holding. Lewis now has back in something of a quandary, and I would welcome further discussion of the case at Conference. I thought I should let you know that my views are not as settled as I had thought at the time of our original conference.

I should add that I do have a great deal of difficulty with Lewis' suggestion that the good faith defense should be extended to municipal corporations. Such an extension could hardly be justified on the rationale that we need to encourage people to accept public employment and to discharge their duties in a fearless manner.

Respectfully,

[Signature]
February 23, 1978

No. 75-1914, Monell v. Dept. of Social Services

Dear Lewis:

I very much appreciate your helpful and welcome comments on the Monell memoranda. I certainly cannot disagree with the first reservation you voice to my position, namely that we need not overrule Monroe and Moor but might simply restrict those cases to their facts. See my Memorandum at 8. I find your second suggestion—that in this case we should "recognize a defense for policies promulgated in good faith that affect adversely constitutional rights not clearly defined at the time of violation"—a bit more troublesome. What particularly bothers me about it is that the question of what type of immunity should be afforded municipal or quasi-municipal bodies if such bodies are sueable directly under § 1983 has not been briefed in this case. I'd not like to repeat here the earlier errors of rushing to decision without adequate briefing. The possible confusion that can arise from such lack of briefing is painfully evident from the treatment given the question of the "personhood" of municipalities under § 1983 in Monroe, Moor, and Kenosha. Although I have a good deal of sympathy for affording municipal bodies the type of good faith defense you propose, I really do believe that the lower courts should grapple with the issue first, so that when the issue returns here, it will have been fully considered and fully briefed. I am not adverse, however, explicitly to direct the attention of the lower court on remand to the qualified immunity question, and provide the court with our views on the contours of the issue.
Parenthetically, I would like to voice my agreement with your observation, at pp. 9-10 of your memorandum, that "[i]f we continue to deny § 1983 relief against local governmental units, we strengthen the argument for Bivens relief [against these bodies]."

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Mr. Justice Powell

Copies to the Conference
Re: 75-1914 - Monell v. Department of Social Services

MEMORANDUM TO THE CONFERENCE:

Of course Monell or any pending case can be discussed by anyone who desires. Since I received the several memos rather late today, I am prepared to listen but not to discuss.

Regards,
February 23, 1978

No. 75-1914 Monell v. Dept. of Social Services

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to deny §1983 relief against local governmental units, we strengthen the argument for Bivens relief. I would prefer to avoid this pressure.

I am grateful to both "Bills" for their most helpful contributions to our deliberations in this case.

L.F.P., Jr.
Re: 75-1914 - Monell v. Dept. of Social Services

Dear Bill,

As Lewis has indicated, we are indebted to both you and Bill Rehnquist for educating your Brethren as you have. I am grateful.

I also appreciate Lewis' memorandum. I agree with you and with him that school boards are persons for the purpose of §1983 but share his preference for not overruling Monroe and Moor. At this juncture, however, I am not at rest as to the possible immunity of school boards and prefer not to decide the issue. At least, that is my tentative view.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Mr. Justice Brennan

Copies to the Conference