

BACKGROUND

The Chairman would like to make a brief statement, prior to hearing testimony this morning, in order to give a little background on this particular legislation.

During the 89th Congress, Subcommittee No. 4, under the chairmanship of the Honorable John Dowdy of Texas, held detailed hearings on similar legislation in March and May 1966. The printed hearing record on optometry before Mr. Dowdy's subcommittee contains almost 400 pages. That record will be incorporated by reference with the testimony which is presented before this subcommittee on the pending bills.

During the last Congress, this Committee received testimony, professional data and exhibits, and arguments from essentially every professional or other occupational group, organization and person directly or indirectly interested in the practice of optometry. Although the record on this legislation is quite complete, the Committee is holding these additional hearings to receive any new and important information which may not already be in the evidence before the Committee.

I strongly suggest that the witnesses who will appear this morning devote themselves to any new information they desire to present to the Committee, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of material already a part of the Committee record.

Let me make it very clear at this point, and I believe I speak for every Member of the Committee, that our concern in these hearings is the visual health of the citizens of the Nation's Capital. Good vision is probably the most important element in the health, safety, and welfare of the people of the community. The public should be assured that the eye care available to the public in the District of Columbia will offer the highest standards and professional skills.

The attention of this Committee will be directed toward progress in this public health area as we consider the statements and testimony on the bills before us today. The public is entitled to the assurance that any person engaged in the practice of optometry achieves his patronage from his skill, ability, and the reputation he creates for the excellence of his professional service and the good visual health of his patients.

PRESENT LAW

The present law governing the practice of optometry in the District of Columbia was enacted in 1924. (Act of May 28, 1924, 43 Stat. 177; D.C. Code Title 2, Sec. 501 et seq.) This Act has not been amended by the Congress since that date. During the 43 years since that law was enacted, every other State in the Union and our territories have amended their laws relating to the practice of optometry or in other ways improved the laws governing such practice to bring them more closely into conformity with modern education and new technical skills developed in the practice of optometry.

The laws relating to the practice of optometry for the District of Columbia need to be modernized and improved. The Board of Optometry receives numerous complaints concerning unethical prac-