

STATEMENT OF OSBY L. WEIR FOR THE METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON BOARD OF TRADE
BEFORE SUBCOMMITTEE No. 5, HOUSE DISTRICT COMMITTEE, AUGUST 14, 1967

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, I am Osby L. Weir, General Manager, Washington Area, Sears, Roebuck and Company. I appear here today as the Secretary of the Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade, to voice that organization's opposition to H.R. 595, H.R. 732, H.R. 1283 and H.R. 10075 also H.R. 12276 and H.R. 12297—all bills to amend the Optometry Law of the District of Columbia.

These bills, except for slight variations in phraseology and punctuation, are similar in effect. The stated purpose of these bills is to re-write and up-date the Optometry Law of the District of Columbia. This would be accomplished by the repeal of the existing provisions of the Optometry Law and the enactment of an entirely new law within the District.

At previous hearings the Medical profession, the Guild of Prescription Opticians of America, the Guild of Prescription Opticians of Washington, D.C., the National Association of Optometrists and Opticians, as well as the Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade have opposed the proposed re-writing of the Optometric Law—on the grounds that it deprives the public of freedom of choice in the selection of optical aids, at considerable expense and no corresponding benefit.

The Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade directs its opposition to one particular effect of these proposals, if enacted.

The existing Optometric Law of the District of Columbia provides in Section 20—

"That the provisions of this Act shall not apply—

* * * * *

(b) To persons selling spectacles and (or) eyeglasses and who do not attempt either directly or indirectly to adapt them to the eye, and who do not practice or profess to practice optometry."

Bills H.R. 595, H.R. 1283, and H.R. 10075, on the contrary, not only eliminate this provision, but provide, in Section 8(a), subdivision (4).—

"It shall be unlawful for any person * * * with the exception of nonprescription sunglasses or nonprescription protective eyewear, to sell or offer to sell to the public eyeglasses, spectacles, or lenses to fit or duplicate lenses, without a written prescription from a licensed physician or optometrist."

(H.R. 732 has a similar provision, Section 8(a) (4), but requires that the prescription come from a physician or optometrist licensed to practice in the District of Columbia.)

POINT ONE. THE PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE THE SALE OF READY-TO-WEAR READING GLASSES IS DESIGNED BY ORGANIZED OPTOMETRY TO ELIMINATE COMPETITION

It seems quite illogical that men who seek to insure for themselves a "professional" status should consider magnifying spectacles a source of competition. The usual cry of "pro bono publico" has been raised by the American Optometric Association, sponsors of these bills. In order to maintain this position, they would have to show (1) that the sale of these glasses is injurious, or (2) the public was deceived, or (3) that the public could obtain better or equal service from them at lesser cost.

In none of these instances can they maintain their position. In fact, the contrary is true. The public's purchase of ready-to-wear reading glasses serves a great human cause. First, these simple ready-to-wear magnifiers in convenient frames are aids to old-aged vision. Second, the cost is nominal, from \$1.50 to \$3.95 per pair as against purchasing the same from an optometrist for five to ten times more. Third, there is authoritative medical testimony that they "cannot effect any change in your eyes, let alone 'ruin them.'"

POINT TWO. READY-TO-WEAR MAGNIFYING SPECTACLES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE COMFORT OF MANKIND

Middle-aged farsightedness is as natural as gray hair. With the advancing years, the eye gradually loses its powers of accommodation for near vision because the eye lens becomes progressively harder. From the age of forty on, most people just cannot seem to hold things far enough away to see them clearly.

Years of research have produced the simple answer for farsightedness. It is a pair of magnifying glasses for reading and close work. These magnifying