

VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION,
OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,
Washington, D.C., October 31, 1967.

HON. HARLEY O. STAGGERS,
Chairman, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The following comments are furnished in response to your request for a report on H.R. 12843, 90th Congress.

The general purpose of the bill is to establish a National Eye Institute in the Public Health Service. This would be an institute for the conduct and support of research for new treatments and cures and training relating to blinding eye diseases and visual disorders. Research and training in the special health problems and requirements of the blind and in the basic and clinical sciences relating to the mechanism of the visual function and preservation of sight would be involved.

Provisions are made for an Advisory Council to advise and make recommendation to the Surgeon General in this area. The latter would be authorized to provide training and instruction and to establish and maintain traineeships and fellowships in the Institute in matters relating to blinding eye diseases and visual disorders with stipends, allowances, and travel expenses as necessary. This could also be accomplished through grants to public or other nonprofit institutions.

The bill would be administered under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It does not appear to impose additional administrative responsibilities on the Veterans Administration, though its broad effects would be of interest to this agency in connection with its medical program for veterans.

For many years the Veterans Administration has recognized the importance of concentrated efforts toward preventing blindness and assisting the blind. We have included in our programs research activities in this field with particular reference to the problems and treatment of blinded veterans.

While we appreciate the general purpose of the bill, we defer to the views of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, which would have overall administrative responsibility, as to the need for this legislation in the light of other existing programs and whether the approach employed by this bill would be an effective method for achieving its aims.

We are advised by the Bureau of the Budget that there is no objection to the presentation of this report from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,

W. J. DRIVER, *Administrator.*

MR. JARMAN. Our first witness today will be our colleague on the committee, Sam Friedel, who is deeply interested in this problem, as we all are.

Sam, we are glad to have you with us today and you may proceed with your statement in your own fashion.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SAMUEL N. FRIEDEL, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MARYLAND**

MR. FRIEDEL. Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to be given the opportunity to testify today before your Subcommittee on Public Health and Welfare in support of my proposal, H.R. 586, a bill to establish a separate National Eye Institute under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health.

Blindness and other visual disorders constitute one of the most severe health problems in America today. Statistics show that 1 million Americans are functionally blind, that is, unable to read a newspaper even with the aid of glasses.

Three and one-half million citizens of this country are afflicted with some sort of permanent visual defect that can't be corrected within the range of our scientific knowledge today.

Furthermore, 75 million Americans must wear glasses in order to achieve acceptable vision. To my way of thinking, these figures indi-