

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY OF RHODE ISLAND  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION,  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
ON MARCH 9, 1959

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee on Special Education, I am appearing on behalf of H.R. 5243, a bill I introduced to provide for the establishment of a temporary Presidential Commission to study the potentialities, problems, and needs of blind persons in the United States in relation to the various Federally-supported services and programs designed to assist them. The need for a comprehensive, authoritative, and objective study of this type has become increasingly apparent during the past several years. The rapid growth and development of service programs as a result of legislation enacted during and since World War II; changing concepts in rehabilitation, education of the handicapped, social insurance, and social welfare in general; changing public attitudes toward the blind; the steadily increasing population of blind persons--all of these factors emphasize the necessity for a high level study of programs and services for blind persons in order to objectively determine the adequacy of existing services and to recommend improvement in the light of present and future needs.

My bill would provide for such a study of services and programs supported to any extent by Federal funds with the exception of medical research. As you know, I have been an advocate of increasing Federal support for medical research as the best hope for eliminating the killing and disabling diseases of mankind; and I will continue to be a strong advocate of effective medical research. However, our concern in this bill is for those persons who must make their way in life without sight--the several thousand premature babies of a few years ago (now of grade school age) who lost their sight because of excessive oxygen in incubators

before the cause was discovered and eliminated, the men and women who are blinded each year in industrial and other accidents, and those who lost and continue to lose their sight through diseases whose cure and cause are not yet known. We are interested in learning how we can better assist such people to become full participants in the economic and social life of the nation.

My bill calls for a Study Commission consisting of nine members to be appointed by the President from among prominent persons in public and private life and the pertinent professions. It authorizes the employment of a full-time staff and permits the utilization of specialists from voluntary agencies for short periods of time without compensation except for expenses. The duration of the study would be two and a half years, and a total appropriation of \$450,000 would be authorized to carry it out. This amount would cover a per diem allowance of \$50 and travel expenses for members of the Commission, salaries and travel expenses of the staff, printing of the final report and staff background documents, office supplies, and the like for the entire two and a half year period.

The Commission is charged with studying existing Federal laws which provide services or benefits to blind persons; with studying and evaluating the standards of these services; and with formulating and recommending standards where none exist, in addition to any other recommendations it may make for improvement of services. Thus, programs and benefits for blind persons administered by several Federal agencies would be covered as would State programs in which the Federal Government participates financially. Only those voluntary agencies which participate in Federal programs through the purchase of products, such as workshops for the blind, or through the purchase of services would be included. Since the study provided for in my bill would involve programs and benefits administered by several agencies of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government and one agency

of the Legislative Branch--the Library of Congress, which administers the "Books for the Blind" program--I firmly believe that the Commission should be housed at a supradepartmental level, such as the Executive Offices of the President.

I know that the study provided for in this bill will result in improving services to blind people and make it possible for many more of them to take their rightful places in the productive life of our nation.