

STATEMENT OF IRVIN P. SCHLOSS, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST
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TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee on Special Education, I sincerely appreciate this opportunity to testify on H.R. 14 and on H.R. 5243 now being considered by you. Before discussing these bills, I should like to tell you something of my personal background. I was totally blinded in combat in France 14 years ago during World War II. For almost ten years--August 1948 to June 1958--I served as Publications Editor and then as Executive Director of the Blinded Veterans Association, a national membership organization of blind persons which operates a rehabilitation program based upon the coordinated utilization of existing rehabilitation and employment resources in the community. Since last June, I have been the Legislative Analyst of the American Foundation for the Blind, the national voluntary research, consultant, and standard-setting agency in the field of work for the blind.

Thus, I come before you as a blind person myself, as a life member of a national organization of blind persons, as the former staff director and administrator of that organization's service program, and as a new staff member of the national agency which is striving to improve services to blind persons. I therefore believe that I am well-qualified to discuss H.R. 14 and the various study commission bills now being considered by this Subcommittee.

A blind person, like any other human being in our American society, aspires to go through life with dignity and grace, fulfilling his own destiny as he sees it in accordance with his individual interests, aptitudes, and

ability. The vagaries of life in our complex social structure--economic conditions, family situations, wars, illness, accidents--frequently make it necessary for an individual--any individual--to redefine his objectives in accordance with what can be realistically accomplished. In addition to the usual stresses in life with which an individual must cope, a blind person also has to learn to deal with those which stem from the nature of his disability. He must learn how to get around by himself and how to do things without the use of his eyes. He must learn how to cope with public attitudes which, owing to lack of understanding and misconceptions, tend to set him apart. He must cope with employer resistance based on the extraneous fact that he happens to be blind rather than on the question of his ability to do the job he is seeking. Most blind people need assistance in dealing with the special problems their blindness imposes; and the people of the United States, through their representatives in the Congress and in the several state legislatures, have provided a basic framework--government-sponsored rehabilitation programs--through which some of the needed assistance can be provided on an organized basis.

The mere fact that such programs exist does not, of course, mean that they are functioning with maximum effectiveness in every state. In fact, most programs of services to blind persons could stand improvement. It takes people to implement programs; and one of the ways of improving services to blind persons is to get especially well-trained individuals with special skills needed to carry out these services. From personal observation, I can report that there is increasing awareness of the need for better qualified personnel to serve blind persons; and efforts are being made to raise professional standards of personnel. It would also be most desirable for an authoritative study under irreproachable sponsorship to be made of Federally-supported services and programs to blind persons with a

view to establishing the facts as they exist and indicating remedial action which should be taken.

H.R. 14 and its companion bills would not do this nor would it of itself insure improved services. Rather, these bills would inject a completely superfluous, extraneous issue into social welfare legislation. The identical title of these bills--"A bill to protect the right of the blind to self-expression through organizations of the blind"--is itself misleading and is based upon a questionable premise. It seems to me that the Constitution of the United States already provides adequate protection of the right of every American citizen to join any organization which does not advocate the overthrow of the Government of the United States by force or violence, and that H.R. 14 is not needed to guarantee this right to blind persons. Any blind person who feels that he has been prevented from joining an organization of the blind would certainly be justified in taking action through appropriate channels.

At this point, I would suggest that this Subcommittee might wish to consider a simple amendment to Public Law 565, 83rd Congress, as a means of providing the mechanism by which an individual who feels that his entitlement to vocational rehabilitation service is questioned would be given an opportunity for a fair hearing of his case. Such a mechanism is provided for in the public assistance, disability insurance, and other titles of the Social Security Act, as well as in veterans and other legislation. It seems to me that it would be desirable to provide that state plans for vocational rehabilitation similarly be required to include provision of the right to a fair hearing.

I would respectfully urge the Subcommittee not to take favorable action on H.R. 14 or its companion bills but to consider instead H.R. 5243, which is also pending before you. H.R. 5243, unlike H.R. 14, is a constructive measure,

providing for an authoritative, objective, and adequately financed study of services to blind persons from which substantial benefit will result. This bill calls for the establishment of a Presidential Study Commission consisting of nine members to be appointed by the President from among widely recognized persons in public and private life and the pertinent professions. The study would be limited to services, programs, and benefits for blind persons supported to any extent by Federal funds, with the exception of medical research. The only voluntary agencies which would be studied under this bill are those which receive Federal funds for the purchase of products, such as workshops, or for the purchase of services. The duration of the study would be 30 months; and the requested authorization of \$450,000 for the entire study would cover per diem allowances and travel expenses of the members of the Commission, salaries and travel expenses of the staff, office supplies, printing of the final report and staff background documents, and the like. With Congressman Fogarty's permission, I have submitted with my statement a detailed estimate of the cost of the study and the assumptions used in arriving at the total of \$450,000.

Under H.R. 5243, the Commission is charged with studying existing services and benefits, with evaluating standards of service, and with formulating and recommending standards of service where none exist, in addition to any other recommendations it may make. Since programs and benefits administered by several agencies of the Executive Branch and by the Library of Congress would be studied, we think it is essential that the Commission be housed at a supra-departmental level, such as the Executive Offices of the President.

Those of us who are sincerely interested in the welfare of our fellow-citizens who happen to be blind firmly believe that enactment of legislation as provided by H.R. 5243 is a vital first step in improving services designed to assist blind persons to take their place as contributing members of our society.

ESTIMATED COST OF STUDY

PERSONAL SERVICES

Executive Director at \$15,000 per annum	\$ 30,000	
Professional Staff (9) at \$10,000 per annum	180,000	
Clerical Staff (5) at \$4,500 per annum	45,000	
Commission Members (9) at \$50 per diem	<u>36,000</u>	
		\$ 291,000

TRAVEL AND MAINTENANCE 84,000

STATIONERY AND SUPPLIES 5,000

TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH 5,000

PRINTING 15,000

Total expenditures for two full years 400,000

Total expenditures for first six months 50,000

TOTAL EXPENDITURES \$ 450,000

The Executive Director should be an individual with both administrative experience and a thorough background in social research techniques and methods. We believe that a salary of at least \$15,000 a year would be called for to obtain the high caliber person required for this position. Nine professional staff members at an average salary of \$10,000 a year each would be required. Each of these staff members should be particularly knowledgeable in one of the areas of the study delineated in Section 4 (a)(2). Five capable stenographers and clerk-typists would be needed at an average salary of \$4,500 a year.

The figure for per diem allowances for Commission members is based on the assumption that all nine would work on the study 40 days a year during the two full years.

The figure for travel is based on an average allocation of \$2,000 a year for travel expenses to each of 21 persons.

The amount of \$50,000 is considered adequate to cover salaries and all expenses during the first six months of the study when members of the Commission will be appointed, personnel hired, and procedures outlined.

We know that the President's Commission on Veterans Pensions (the Bradley Commission) spent slightly in excess of \$330,000 during the 15-month existence. This did not include the cost of printing its report and staff background papers, these costs having been borne by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the Department of Defense. Also, the Executive Director and the Technical Advisor--the two top staff members--were retired military officers and did not receive compensation for their services to the Commission.