

STATEMENT OF ROBERT B. IRWIN, NEW YORK CITY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND

Mr. IRWIN. I am an executive officer of the American Foundation for the Blind which is carrying on work for the blind throughout the entire country. Part of our task is to assist the different States in organizing agencies for the blind where they are needed, and to help the established organizations to improve their work.

There are a number of features in this bill that appeal especially to us that are interested in the blind. There are three suggestions that we would like to make of changes in the bill. One is in regard to the benefits extended to the aged people. We would like to suggest that blind people 50 years of age be entitled to the benefits extended to the seeing people of 65. That is a provision that has worked out very satisfactorily in the British old-age pension, and experience has shown that for the most part a blind person of 50 years of age, especially if he loses his sight around that period, is about as much handicapped economically as a seeing person of 65. A further suggestion has to do with the 'definition of crippled children. I think that is in section 702. We would like to see the definition of crippled children so interpreted as to include children with a serious defective vision. Blindness or seriously impaired vision is perhaps as great a physical handicap as most other forms of crippled condition, and we feel that that should logically be included among the crippled children.

The prevention work for children with impaired vision is perhaps as satisfactory in its results as the prevention and curative work done for almost any other work of physically handicapped children.

The third provision which we would like to suggest has to do with the establishment of a Federal bureau somewhat similar to that contemplated for crippled children, but extending the same sort of Federal encouragement to State work for the blind in general as is proposed here to extend to crippled children. The proposal is concretely that there be set up a department under the Department of Labor, possibly under the Children's Bureau itself, a department which would extend aid to States in getting work for the blind established. We believe that \$1,500,000 should be appropriated for that purpose and be used in matching State money for constructive work with the blind throughout the country.

I might say that it is part of the responsibility of the American Foundation for the Blind to assist different States in getting State commissions or State departments for the blind established, and we have found it extremely difficult to get departments established at all, and when we have, the appropriations have been entirely inadequate to carry on the work in these new States. We have been responsible for establishing commissions for the blind under the State governments of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa, and Texas, but the appropriations under those commissions are quite inadequate. I have prepared to have submitted to your committee a map showing where the work for the blind is carried on in this country under State and private support.

We figure that it costs us about \$25 per capita of the blind population per year to carry on adequate constructive work for the blind. There are only a few States in the northeasterly part of the United

States that are appropriating this amount. There are 10 States in this country that are appropriating nothing toward the care of the blind, 13 that are appropriating less than \$5 per capita of their blind population, and we feel that adequate service to the blind will not come into the country for generations, unless some form of Federal cooperation is made possible.

Senator GEORGE (acting chairman). Have you submitted formal suggestions covering the three points you have referred to?

Mr. IRWIN. Yes; I have that written.

Senator GEORGE. If you have that and desire to give it to the reporter, it will be included at this point in the record so that the committee will have the advantage of your suggestions.

Mr. IRWIN. I will submit the following proposed amendment:

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO S. 1130

OLD AGE ASSISTANCE

Title I, section 3, to be amended to read as follows:

SEC. 3. As used in this title, "old-age assistance" shall mean financial assistance assuring a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health to persons not less than sixth-five years of age who, at the time of receiving such financial assistance, are not inmates of public or other charitable institutions: *Provided*, That in the case of a person so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential, and so certified by a regular practicing physician, skilled in diseases of the eye, the provisions of this act shall apply to such blind person at the age of fifty years.

CARE OF CRIPPLED CHILDREN (TITLE VII, SEC. 702)

After the words "crippled children" wherever they occur (subsection (a), lines 5 and 16, and subsection (b), line 6) the words "including children with seriously defective vision" to be inserted.

CARE OF THE BLIND (TITLE IX)

SEC. 901 (a). In order to enable the Federal Government to cooperate with the State agencies concerned with the amelioration of the condition of the blind and the prevention of blindness, especially in rural districts, there is hereby appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1936, from funds in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$1,500,000, and there is hereby authorized to be appropriated \$1,500,000 for each fiscal year thereafter. From these amounts so much, not to exceed 5 per centum, as the Secretary of Labor shall find to be necessary for administering the provisions of this section and for investigations and reports related thereto, shall be deducted annually for this purpose, to be available until expended. The remainder shall be allotted to States for purposes of locating blind persons and providing facilities for diagnosis and care of their eye conditions, vocational training, employment, home teaching, and other social service, and to provide special equipment used in the education and employment of the blind: *Provided*, That no portion of such moneys shall be expended for direct relief, or paid to a blind person, except as compensation for services rendered or as a maintenance subsidy during a period of vocational training; nor shall any portion be paid to any educational institution for the instruction or maintenance of any person under the age of twenty-one, except for persons who are both blind and deaf. For each fiscal year from the appropriations herein authorized,

(1) The Secretary of Labor shall apportion \$1,000,000 among the States, allotting \$10,000 to each State, and the remainder to States in proportion to the number of certified blind persons registered in each State: *Provided*, That no allotment made to a State under this paragraph shall exceed the sum of the amount made available by the State for the purposes of this section and the amount apportioned to it under paragraph (2) of this subsection.

(2) The Secretary of Labor shall apportion the remainder among States unable, because of severe economic distress, to match in full the amounts allotted under paragraph (1) for their use in matching such sums or for special demonstrations of methods of welfare work for the blind.

(b) The sums provided under paragraph (2) of subsection (a) shall be available for expenditure until the close of the succeeding fiscal year. So much of the amount apportioned under paragraph (1) of subsection (a) to any State for any fiscal year as remains unpaid to such State at the close thereof, shall be available until the close of the succeeding fiscal year for expenditures in that State under the conditions prescribed in such paragraph (1), or, if not requested by the State agency for the welfare of the blind, for allocation to States as provided in such paragraph (2).

(c) In order to receive the benefits of this section a State must, through a State agency concerned with the amelioration of the condition of the blind or, if there be none or more than one such agency, through a State agency designated by the legislature or provisionally designated by the Governor if the legislature be not in session, to cooperate with the Department of Labor under the provisions of this section, submit to the Department of Labor a detailed plan for effectuating the purposes of this section within such State, information concerning the number of certified blind persons resident in the State, and information concerning the amounts made available by the State for the purposes of this section which should at least equal the amounts made available for similar purposes during the fiscal year next preceding the passage of this Act, unless special circumstances can be shown; and, if an allocation under paragraph (2) of subsection (a) of this section is requested, the conditions leading to such request. A State plan must include reasonable provision for State administration, adequate facilities for locating and certifying blind persons, adequate medical care of the eyes, reasonable provision for vocational training, employment, and home instruction of the blind, and cooperation with medical, health and welfare groups and organizations. When the Secretary of Labor deems a State plan and the administration thereof to be in reasonable conformity with the provisions of this section, he shall approve the same and send due notice of such approval to the State agency concerned.

(d) For the purposes of this section, a blind person shall be defined to mean one whose vision is insufficient for the ordinary activities of life for which eyesight is essential, such insufficiency of vision to be determined by examination by a regular practicing physician, skilled in diseases of the eye; provided that such examining physician shall certify in writing the diagnosis, prognosis, and visual acuity of the person examined, and shall state whether in his opinion such person is blind within the meaning of this Act and whether there is any likelihood that his vision could be restored or improved by proper treatment, operation, or adjustment of glasses.

PARTICIPATION BY DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

SEC. 902. (a) Out of the amounts authorized in this title the Secretary of Labor is authorized to employ such experts, assistants, clerks, and other persons in the District of Columbia and elsewhere, to be taken from the eligible lists of the Civil Service Commission, and to purchase such supplies, material, equipment, office fixtures, and apparatus, and to incur such travel and other expenses as it may deem necessary for carrying out the purposes of this title. It shall be the duty of the Secretary of Labor to make or cause to be made such studies, investigations, and reports as will promote the efficient administration of this title.

(b) Within thirty days after an appropriation has been made under the authority of this title, the Secretary of Labor shall make the apportionments on the basis of certified registered blind persons as provided herein, shall certify to the Secretary of the Treasury and to the treasurers of the several States the amounts apportioned for the purposes specified, and shall certify to the Secretary of the Treasury the amounts estimated by the Secretary of Labor to be necessary for administering the provisions of this title.

(c) Within sixty days after any appropriation authorized by this title has been made, and as often thereafter while such appropriation remains unexpended as changed conditions may warrant, the Secretary of Labor shall ascertain and certify to the Secretary of the Treasury and the Treasurer of the United States the amounts to which each State is entitled under the provisions of this title, in accordance with plans submitted by the States and approved by the Secretary of Labor. Such certificate shall show that the State has complied with all requirements of the pertinent sections of the title. When in conformity with the provisions of the title such certificate, until revoked as provided in subsection (d) hereof, shall be sufficient authority to the Treasurer to make payment to the State in accordance therewith.

(d) Each State agency cooperating with the Department of Labor under the provisions of this title shall make such reports concerning its operations and expenditures as shall be prescribed or requested by the Department. The Department, after due notice in writing, setting forth the reasons therefor, may revoke any existing certificate provided for in subsection (c) whenever it shall determine that any State agency has not properly expended or supervised the expenditure of moneys paid to it for the purposes and in accordance with the provisions of this title.

(e) The Secretary of Labor shall perform or cause to be performed under his supervision the duties required for the carrying out of the provisions of this title and shall include in his annual report to Congress a full account of the administration of this title and expenditures of the moneys herein authorized.

(f) As used in this title, the term "State" shall include Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

[NOTE.—In case the duties prescribed under this title can be assigned to the Children's Bureau, we suggest renumbering sec. 901 under title VII and omitting sec. 902.1

I would like to take just a minute to have Miss McKee of our staff show you the map which we have prepared, just to give you a graphic indication of what is being done for the blind constructively throughout the country. This does not cover relief work. This work that is shown on this map is constructive work for finding employment for those who lose their sight in adult life.

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY ROBERT B. IRWIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND, INC., NEW YORK, N.Y.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS TO S. 1130 TO EXTEND ITS BENEFITS TO INCLUDE BLIND PEOPLE

The American Foundation for the Blind, which is a national organization carrying on work in behalf of the blind in the United States, is especially interested in the general principles underlying Senate bill 1130. We have appeared here today to suggest certain modifications in this bill in order to extend its benefits to the blind as well as to the crippled and aged. There are three proposals which I would like to bring to your consideration:

1. I would like to suggest that a clause be inserted in title 1, section 3, providing that a blind person receive the old-age benefits beginning at age 50 instead of at age 65. Experience in both the United States and Great Britain has shown that owing to their tremendous handicap, most blind men of 50 years of age are quite as much disadvantaged economically as are seeing men of 65. I would suggest, therefore, that we adopt the plan followed in the British old-age pension, namely, that of extending to blind people of 50 years of age, the benefits conferred upon seeing people at the age of 65. This would not greatly add to the financial burden of the law, but would be an act of far-reaching mercy to a considerable number of blind people in this country for whom it is extremely difficult to find ways of earning their living after they have passed the fiftieth year.

2. We would like to propose that the phrase "crippled children" in section 702 be interpreted to include children who are crippled by reason of serious impairment of vision. I believe that the logic of this is apparent. There are few forms of disability more handicapping than that of blindness. One of the most encouraging aspects of the situation, however, is the fact that a very large percentage need not be blind if adequate care is provided at the proper time. Probably prevention methods are more effective in this group than in any other group of physically handicapped children. I hope, therefore, that the committee will find it possible to reword section 702 so as to insure that children with a serious defect of vision will not be excluded from the benefits of the law.

3. I would most urgently commend to your serious consideration the insertion of a new title, perhaps as title 9. This proposal is that arrangements be made for Federal cooperation in organizing and developing work for the blind throughout the country, especially in the States having a very large rural population.

Contrary to common impression, the blind people have been very much neglected in many parts of this country. Adequate provision has been made for the education of blind children in every State, but constructive work for adult blind people is entirely absent in 10 States and is almost negligible in 13 others.

A constructive program for the blind includes medical care for the eyes, if sight can be restored or improved, vocational guidance and training, placement, sheltered employment, home instruction in Braille (the embossed type used by the blind) social service, and care of blind children of pre-school age. It is estimated that an adequate program of this sort requires an average annual expenditure of \$25 per year.

Aside from humanitarian reasons, such a program is in the long run an economy, for it will result in restoration of sight to hundreds of blind persons, with consequent restoration to economic independence, and will also enable thousands of others to become wholly or partially self-supporting and relieve the community of the burden of their dependency.

This map shows expenditures in 1934 for work for the blind, both publicly and privately supported, exclusive of education of the young blind and relief from public funds.

The six States shown in black spent in 1934 more than \$25 per blind person. Massachusetts heads the list with an expenditure of about \$70 per blind person.

The 19 States in the dark shading spent from \$5 to \$25 per blind person in 1934. The 13 States shown in light shading spent less than \$5 per blind person, an amount obviously inadequate for a constructive program; and the 10 States shown in white spent nothing at all for the economic rehabilitation and social adjustment of their blind people.

We are suggesting that under the Department of Labor-possibly under the Children's Bureau itself-there be created a Department for the Blind which will cooperate in establishing State work for the blind in every Commonwealth of the country. We are suggesting that \$1,500,000 be appropriated annually to be used in matching sums appropriated by the States for the conduct of well organized and well conceived State agencies for the blind.

After 12 years' experience in helping to organize work for the blind in all parts of the country, we at the American Foundation for the Blind have reached the conclusion that unless Federal aid can be secured for these States their blind citizens will be left in darkness and idleness for generations.

Gentlemen, I hope you will help us to eliminate those broad expanses of white on the map which indicate a shameful neglect of the blind.

EXPENDITURES FOR WORK FOR THE BLIND FROM PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS,
BY STATES, 1934

(Excluding relief from public funds and education of the young blind)

More than \$25 per blind person.-Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York.

From \$5 to \$25 per blind person.-California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

Less than \$5 per blind person.-Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia.

No expenditure.-Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota.

Senator **GEORGE**. The map may be left with the secretary of the committee. I do not know that it can be incorporated in the record, because there is some difficulty about incorporating these maps in the record, but we will have it for reference.

I understand you have another witness who you wish heard at this time?

Mr. **IRWIN**. Yes; if he can be heard, Mr. Lewis H. Carris.

STATEMENT OF LEWIS H. CARRIS, MANAGING DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS, INC.

Mr. **CARRIS**. I shall be very brief, Mr. Chairman. The National Society for the Prevention of Blindness approve the suggestions which Mr. Irwin has made. We of course are particularly interested