

HR 6971

STATEMENT BY
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MEMBER OF CONGRESS
TO THE SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION,
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
ON
H. R. 6476,
THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1965

Madam Chairman:

I am furnishing this statement to you and your committee in support of H. R. 6476, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1965.

As you know, I have introduced an identical Administration bill, H. R. 6971, as evidence of my endorsement and support for this progressive and much-needed legislation.

For several years it has been my privilege and responsibility to review the annual requests for appropriations submitted by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration as part of the budget of the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare. In the process of these annual reviews, I have obtained a detailed insight into the workings of the programs for handicapped people which are administered by that agency. The Labor-Health, Education and Welfare Appropriation Subcommittee, of which I am Chairman, has, as a result of these annual reviews, expressed its confidence in the leadership and administration of the vocational rehabilitation program by recommending substantial increases annually in the funds required to advance this work.

It is through this agency and its cooperating state vocational rehabilitation agencies that our nation carries out its principal obligation to restore more physically and mentally handicapped people to employment. To those of us who have followed the progress of this work for several years, the present stage of development is gratifying, in contrast to the small programs which existed a decade or so ago.

However, today, at a time when our nation is so deeply committed to the reduction of poverty, to bringing education to all, to opening employment opportunities to all our people, this vocational rehabilitation program still is operated on much too small a scale. Despite other advances and the general affluence of this country, the vocational rehabilitation program is rehabilitating only about half the number of people each year that we could reasonably expect to be served under this federal-state program. The training program to produce more professional workers in rehabilitation, begun ten years ago, is still not of sufficient size to adequately cope with serious personnel shortages in many fields. The research program has been of great assistance to both public and private rehabilitation agencies, but it still is operated far below its potential.

For these and many other reasons, I hope your committee will report favorably the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1965. In the eleven years which have elapsed since the present law was enacted, many new developments have appeared in rehabilitation

and related fields which make it important for us to help modernize this program by giving it an up-to-date legislative base.

Certainly, the proposal to authorize vocational rehabilitation services up to six months, where this is needed to make a vocational determination, is one step that is urgently needed in this modernizing process. Too many severely disabled people still remain outside the workings of this public program. Research and other experience make it plain that many of these severely disabled people could be restored to employment if our public program were designed in such a way as to give them a real chance. This amendment to authorize a period of six months of services for such cases would be extremely helpful in meeting this need.

With much the same groups of severely disabled people in mind, I recommend that your committee support the amendment to authorize a program of construction grants to assist in expanding and constructing more rehabilitation facilities and workshops. As the nation's efforts to restore more severely disabled people increase, there is a constantly growing requirement for these special centers and workshops in which highly skilled specialists from several fields can concentrate upon an individual case and develop an adequate rehabilitation program. At the same time these centers and workshops will be needed in greater supply than ever to help state rehabilitation agencies make the determinations of vocational potential under the six months' authority which I have just mentioned.

The bill marks the beginning of an organized effort to strengthen and improve workshops for the disabled in this country. The several proposals in this bill, aimed at fortifying the capabilities of workshops, seem to me to be carefully and intelligently drawn, and I believe they will produce an infinitely better system of workshops in the United States.

The proposal to authorize a two-year program of statewide planning in vocational rehabilitation has been needed for some time. The growth of this work, both in the states and in the federal responsibilities, has brought us to a point where each state needs to carefully survey its existing resources, its principal unmet needs and the visible requirements during the next several years. I hope, therefore, that this statewide planning will be reported by your committee and that it will be carried out with energy and imagination by each state.

It is equally important that there be a national look at national programming in vocational rehabilitation. For this reason, the Appropriation Subcommittee this year has provided funds for such a study by a citizens' advisory group, which I am convinced will be a valuable corollary to the statewide studies proposed in this bill.

The other features of the bill will help to round out a more complete approach to the large-scale task of rehabilitating all disabled Americans who need service. For example, the proposal for project grants to expand vocational rehabilitation services under Section 4(a)(2) of the Act can be an important instrument in increasing

the number rehabilitated annually and should help markedly in reaching the President's goal of 200,000 disabled people rehabilitated each year in this program. The proposal for an intra-mural research program and for the conduct of an automated data system serving the whole rehabilitation community will yield results which will be beneficial to public and voluntary agencies, individual practitioners, rehabilitation centers and workshops, universities and other institutions and groups all over the country.

Let me express my appreciation to the committee for its excellent work to date and for its prompt attention to this important legislation. I hope the committee will report a bill in the near future and that I will have the privilege of supporting it on the floor of the House.