

# Eye on Washington



## Children's vision bill introduced in House

The Vision Care for Kids Act of 2007, (HR 507) supported by AOA, was introduced Jan. 17, in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Gene Green (D-TX) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL).

The legislation is intended to make the fight against undiagnosed and untreated vision problems in school-age children a national priority, according to the AOA Washington office.

Both of the bill's sponsors are recognized in Congress as leaders on education and health

issues.

The new House bill is a companion to legislation developed in 2006 in the Senate by Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond (R-MO).

Sen. Bond is a prominent supporter of children's vision issues who endures permanent loss of vision due to amblyopia that went undiagnosed and untreated during his childhood.

He plans to re-introduce his Senate version of the bill shortly.

"Good vision is critical to learning. In fact, 80 percent of what children learn in their early school years is visual.

This important legislation will improve vision care for children to better equip them to succeed in school and in life," Sen. Bond said.

"With the support of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Optometric Association and the Vision Council of America, together we will make a difference in the lives of children across the country," he added.

The legislation would establish a federal grant program focusing on treatment to bolster children's vision initiatives in the states and

encourage children's vision partnerships with non-profit entities.

"The Vision Care for Kids Act is an important assignment for the new Congress, and a timely reminder for America of what needs to be done to help concerned parents and teachers ensure that no child is left behind in the classroom due to an undiagnosed or untreated vision problem," said AOA President C. Thomas Crooks, III, O.D.

"Optometry is proud to support true

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leaders like Reps. Pascrell, Green and Ros-Lehtinen and Sen. Bond in the effort to provide states with the resources — the federal dollars — they need to make children's vision and classroom learning a top priority," Dr. Crooks said.

"Millions of American children currently live with vision loss or vision impairment, yet vision loss is often preventable if vision disorders are properly detected," Rep. Green said. "By targeting the uninsured children who have trouble accessing vision care services and providing at risk children with necessary follow-up

treatment, the Vision Care for Kids Act makes the best use of scarce health care dollars and ensures that each grant dollar goes to the kids most in need of vision care services."

"I am proud to introduce legislation that will improve quality eye care for our children. Eye health has a direct impact on learning and achievement, and it is unacceptable that only one in three children receive preventative vision care before they are enrolled in elementary school," Rep. Pascrell said.

"The grant program in this legislation would provide for timely diag-

nostic examination, treatment and follow-up care. Better eye care will significantly mitigate the effects of visual impairment and open up a new world of academic and social opportunity for our youngest children," Rep. Pascrell said.

"This bill would be a great tool to correct bad vision in our younger children, especially those that need it most: children from lower income homes," Rep. Ros-Lehtinen said. "I support this bill enthusiastically, and I hope my colleagues do the same."

In 2006, Sen. Bond and Rep. Pascrell were selected to receive the

AOA's Health Care Leadership Award for their longtime advocacy for eye and vision care for children.

Ten million children suffer from vision disorders, according to the National Parent Teacher Association.

Vision disorders are considered the fourth most common disability in the United States, and they are one of the most prevalent handicapping conditions in childhood.

"Vision problems that are not diagnosed and treated hinder learning, and — as happened to Senator Bond himself — cause permanent vision loss," Dr. Crooks said.

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