THE CONTACT LENS PRESCRIPTION RELEASE ACT OF 1995

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 6, 1995

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, in the final days of the last session of Congress, I introduced legislation to strengthen the ability of consumers to purchase contact lenses at lower prices, without compromising the quality of the products or services received. It was my hope that interested consumers, providers, and regulators would review and provide comment on the bill prior to reintroduction of the bill in the 104th Congress.

Over the past several months, I have received comments from constituents, consumers, providers and various other interested parties. The overwhelming message is that a Federal law requiring prescribers to release contact lens prescriptions will benefit consumers across American.

Today I am introducing ''The Contact Lens Prescription Release Act of 1995.'' This legislation will require the Federal Trade Commission [FTC] to issue regulations mandating the release of contact lens prescriptions after the initial fitting process has been completed.

While some who provided comments favor mandating the immediate release of prescriptions, and others favor no requirements at all, the balance struck in this legislation ensures that consumers will have enhanced bargaining power when purchasing replacement contact lens without putting the quality of patient care in jeopardy.

Today, more than a dozen States require some form of contact lens prescription release. This experimentation by the States has allowed us to monitor whether unintended consequences have occurred—such as a reduction in the quality of patient care—as a result of mandatory release. To date, I have not seen reports that the quality of patient care has suffered as a result of requiring prescription release after the initial fitting process is complete.

While this legislation provides a minimum standard regarding prescription release, it is likely that some States will experiment with additional ways, such as immediate release of prescriptions, to advance the ability of consumers to purchase high quality contact lens products at the most competitive prices. This legislation allows States to continue to undertake such efforts. We in Congress would serve our constituents well if we continue to monitor these State efforts and follow-up with additional Congressional action if appropriate.

I'd like to take a moment to provide some background to ''The Contact Lens Prescription Release Act of 1995.''

In 1989, the Federal Trade Commission [FTC] restated their requirement that eyeglass lens prescriptions be released by ophthalmologists and optometrists. In the FTC's ruling on eyeglasses, their comments explaining why they did not require the release of contact lens prescriptions is instructive for why this legislation is necessary today. The Commission found the following:

While the record suggests that it is not uncommon for practioners to refuse to give patients copies of their contact lens prescriptions, and that resulting costs to consumers could be significant, *we do not believe that the record contains sufficient reliable evidence to permit a conclusion that the practice is prevalent.*'' [Emphasis added, Federal Register, Vol. 54, No. 47, Monday, March 13, 1989.)

One of the benefits and responsibilities of representing the 13th District of California is having constant contact with constituents. Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to gather ''sufficient reliable evidence'' that nonrelease of contact lens prescriptions does result in higher costs for consumers and that this practice is sufficiently ''prevalent'' to warrant legislative action.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, is rather simple—to allow greater competition in the marketplace. It achieves this goal by calling upon the Federal Trade Commission to issue a regulation requiring the release of contact lens prescriptions after the initial fitting process is complete. While there is strong sentiment in this body to forgo calling for any additional Government regulations, it would be shortsighted to turn aside this legislation for that reason. In enacting this legislation, this bill would eliminate dozens of State regulations that, however well-intentioned and well-suited to the technology and market conditions at the time, have come to block consumer choice today.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. A copy of the legislation follows.

H.R. —

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Contact Lens Prescription Release Act of 1995''.

SEC. 2. PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CONTACT LENSES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Federal Trade Commission shall amend its trade regulation rule on ophthalmic practice published at 16 C.F.R. 456 to require the prescriber to offer to release a copy of the prescriber's prescription for contact lenses—

(1) after the contact lens fitting process is completed, or

(2) in the case of a renewal of a prescription, immediately if there is no change in the prescription's specifications,

regardless of whether or not the patient requests a copy of the prescription. Such a prescription shall expire 2 years from the date of its issue unless the prescriber otherwise specifies based upon the medical judgment of the provider.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of subsection (a):

(1) The term ''prescription'' means the specifications necessary to obtain contact lenses and includes data on the refractive status of patient's eyes and clearly notes that the patient is suitable for contact lenses.

(2) The term ''prescriber'' means an ophthalmologist or optometrist who performs eye examinations under a license issued by a State.

(3) The term ''contact lens fitting process is completed'' means the process which—

(A) begins after the initial eye examination and includes an examination to determine what the lens specifications should be, the purchase of lenses, and an initial evaluation of the fit of the lens on the patient's eyes and follow-up examinations, and

(B) is completed when the prescriber is satisfied that a successful fit has been achieved.

SEC. 3. EFFECT ON STATE LAW.

The prescription release requirement of section 2 does not affect any State law which permits the release of prescriptions for contact lenses on terms which are not more restrictive than the terms of section 2 or regulates who is to be legally permitted to fit contact lenses.

THE CAREER PREPARATION EDUCATION REFORM ACT

HON. WILLIAM (BILL) CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 6, 1995

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the administration's Career Preparation Education Reform Act.

The administration's legislation ensures that: First, funds for in-school youth are administered at the local level by schools; second, the governance structure for education which is determined by State law is respected; and, third, more funds are driven by a needs-based formula to local education agencies than in the current law.

I want to strongly emphasize that, as under the current Perkins Act, any State that receives a grant must designate an education agency or agencies to be responsible for administration. In addition, the State plan must be submitted by the State education agency. This requirement will ensure that funds are used to improve career education in our schools and help schools participate in the development of effective school-to-work opportunity systems to prepare students for college and careers.

I also want to emphasize that this bill ensures that funds will be distributed to local education agencies and postsecondary institutions based on need and directs more funds to local schools than before. It is critically important that we make sure that funds get down to those local schools and communities where the need is greatest.

One of my major concerns over the years has been to ensure that students who are members of special populations benefit from Federal education investments. The intent of this legislation is to focus on achievement for special populations and to ensure that they have the chance to participate in quality programs. The legislation requires that the State describe in its plan how it will serve special populations, and uses a substate allocation formula that drives funds to the neediest schools and communities. States must gather and disseminate data on the effectiveness of services and activities in meeting the needs of women and special populations. They must review applications and grants to ensure that the needs of women, minorities, and other special populations are addressed. They must work to eliminate bias and stereotyping in education, and recommend best practices for serving members of special populations and for training for nontraditional jobs. States must set performance goals for students and provide reports on their progress in achieving their goals, including information on the progress of students who are members of special populations.

I am committed to ensuring that students who are members of special populations receive quality services and the assistance they need to achieve the necessary skills to be successful. We intend to scrutinize this issue as legislation moves through the committee