AEVR joined fellow vision groups in co-sponsoring a first-ever World Sight Day (WSD) Congressional Briefing, presented by Vision 2020/USA, a program of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). Held the second Thursday of each October, WSD focuses global attention on blindness and vision impairment. Louis Pizzarello, M.D., M.P.H. (Columbia University), who serves as Chairman of Vision 2020/USA and the immediate-past IAPB Secretary General, welcomed attendees and noted that 314 million people around the world are visually impaired, with 45 million of them blind. He added that blindness/vision impairment is the sixth leading cause of disabilities in the United States, 80 percent of vision loss is preventable, and that blindness prevention and treatment has an unparalleled economic payoff. He also highlighted the inordinate burden of blindness in developing countries, where vision-related problems account for 25 percent of all visits to clinics.

WSD 2009, which was recognized in a statement by NEI Director Dr. Paul Sieving, had a theme of Gender Equity in Eye Care and Blindness Prevention, which was addressed by Janine Austin Clayton, M.D., Deputy Director of the Office of Research on Women's Health in the Office of the NIH Director. A board-certified ophthalmologist who has served as an attending physician and clinical investigator in cornea and uveitis at the NEI since 1996, Dr. Clayton emphasized that women experience an excess burden of visual impairment worldwide due to sex and gender effects on ocular disease, aging, health states and diseases unique to women, and socioeconomic issues, especially access to eye care. She reported that nearly two-thirds of blind individuals worldwide are women and girls, in many countries men have twice the access to eye care as women, and equal access to eye care could substantially reduce blindness in poor countries.

Dr. Clayton was joined by Jennifer Klein, a Senior Advisor on Global Women's Issues in the Office of Global Women's Issues in the Department of State, who described current efforts by the Obama Administration. Two Members of Congress—Cong. Tim Bishop (D-NY) and Cong. Gene Green (D-TX)—welcomed attendees and stressed the importance of blindness prevention.