Cosmetic Contact Lens Briefing Builds Support for Passage of Legislation

On October 7, Prevent Blindness America (PBA), in partnership with the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) and the American Optometric Association (AOA), held a Congressional Briefing on cosmetic contact lens safety. A welcome was provided by Cong. John Boozman (R-AR), who along with Cong. Henry Waxman (D-CA), sponsored HR 371, legislation that would require consumers to obtain a prescription from a licensed professional to purchase cosmetic contact lenses. (A companion bill in the Senate, S 172, co-sponsored by Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), passed in July). Featured speakers included Dr. Tim Steinemann (Case Western Reserve University/MetroHealth Medical Center) and Dr. Arthur Epstein (North Shore Contact Lens & Vision Consultants), who presented graphic examples of the corneal abrasions, infections and other eye problems associated with use of these unregulated lenses, especially in teens.

On October 26, the House passed HR 371, which was signed by the President on November 11. These cosmetic lenses are now classified as medical devices, reversing an April 2003 action by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that re-classified non-vision correcting cosmetic contact lenses as cosmetic devices. On October 31, the entire vision community joined in a press event to thank the bills’ sponsors and to educate about the positive implications of the legislation for vision health and safety. ■