

Piety by Fial

The House of Representatives is scheduled to take up today an oddly inept little bill introduced by that master of morality, Rep. John Dowdy of Texas, and sent to the floor with slapdash indifference by the House District Committee. Because Mr. Dowdy disapproves of one nonprofit organization licensed to solicit contributions in Washington, he has proposed a measure which would place reckless and dangerously restrictive curbs upon all charitable solicitations here.

The bill provides that no organization shall be able to solicit contributions in Washington unless the District Commissioners are "satisfied that such solicitation will assist in promoting health, welfare, and morals of the District of Columbia." Health and welfare are tolerably definite standards; but who is to say what among the diverse and conflicting groups seeking public support in the Capital promotes the public's "morals."

The vagueness of this standard would open the way to arbitrary and capricious rulings; it would let the Commissioners reject any group they happened to dislike. It would also open the way, we believe, to judicial condemnation of the measure as flagrantly unconstitutional. Existing law adequately protects the community from fraudulent solicitations by requiring registration of all groups which go to the public for funds; and it wisely lets the public decide for itself what it wants to support. That is all the supervision needed by a free people.

The House would do well to send Mr. Dowdy's silly proposal back to the District Committee for redrafting—or better still, consign it promptly to oblivion.