



May 13, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

On behalf of the National Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP), thank you for your leadership in introducing the HEROES Act. ATAP is thankful for the recognition within the HEROES Act for State Assistive Technology (AT) Act Programs, which are experiencing a very large surge in the need for assistive technology for the most vulnerable populations during this pandemic. While we are thankful for the \$5 million increase, we strongly disagree with the inclusion of the language which earmarks this \$5 million for direct payments for devices for American Sign Language interpreters to provide remote interpretation services.

There is an enormous demand for State AT programs' services across the country at this time, and it is forecasted to continue for the upcoming year and beyond due to COVID-19. The rise in demand spans the disability and aging community for technology to meet either pre-existing needs or new needs due to social isolation or independent living driven by stay-at-home orders. The need for our most vulnerable to stay at home may be far longer than for other portions of the nation's population. These vulnerable individuals' assistive technology needs must be addressed, and they are dire. For example, there has been a spike in demand for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices to address social isolation in nursing homes across the country. Individuals who have lost their caregivers due to social distancing are now in need of devices to make independent living possible.

This is just a snapshot of the grave, widespread needs across the disability and aging community. And, while our programs are in need of funding around the \$50 million mark, it is imperative to ensure that any funding dedicated to AT does not include new parameters (such as purchasing devices) or restrict the targeted population (such as American Sign Language interpreters) for whom the funds should serve at this time, or ever. States need the flexibility to determine where



the funds should be spent according to their unique needs, consistent with the statute that governs the State Assistive Technology Act Programs.

If there is ever a time to focus, hone in on, and support the expertise and the unique structure of State Assistive Technology Act Programs, it is now. It is not the time to change the nature of what these programs do and restrict who they are able to serve with additional funds when the needs are bursting at the seams across all eligible populations.

Again, ATAP is thankful for the inclusion of an additional \$5 million for the AT Act, however, the language attached to these funds will make the increase far less impactful.

If you need further information about the AT Act and the programs and services it supports, please contact Audrey Busch at Audrey.busch@ataporg.org. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Audrey Busch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Audrey Busch
Executive Director
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs