



January 22, 2021

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

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

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

On behalf of the National Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP) and the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), we **strongly urge you to support the inclusion of \$50 million in the next stimulus package for the Assistive Technology (AT) Act. Much of this increase would address the needs to accommodate remote working environments; meet the need of consumer demands for devices to combat social isolation, educational needs, employment needs; and create innovative solutions to a rapidly changing landscape.**

Funding provided through the AT Act supports programs that assure people with disabilities have access to and acquisition of the assistive technology services they need to live, work, and access education and services. COVID-19 is changing the “needs” demanded by the aging and people with disabilities as well as creating new barriers that need to be overcome to enable the delivery of direct services.

State AT Act programs operate in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and four territories and are available for persons with all types of disabilities, all ages, in all environments (education, employment, community living and information technology). State AT programs provide a continuum of services that increase the access to, and acquisition of assistive technology, including state financing activities (such as financial loans, cooperative buy, funds of last resort, etc.), device reutilization (including recycling, repair, refurbishment and device exchange), device loan/borrowing and device demonstration services.

ATAP supports a \$50 million allocation in the stimulus package that would enable State Assistive Technology Act Programs across the country to:

- Build/develop a telehealth presence for device demonstrations - such remote ability could allow for someone to be able to acquire the assistive technology and be trained on how to use the assistive technology. With a telepresence, State AT programs can begin to



operate and provide direct services – as many states have been forced to halt device demonstrations and loans - to consumers during the time of COVID-19.

- Increased need at the state level for consumers to have longer term loans for an existing need, or a newly developed need due to COVID-19. States need to have funds to purchase the proper and needed devices during this time. For example, states are in need of tablets to aid with social isolation during this time of self-quarantine.
- Shifting to an online world creates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) accessibility needs across states with their state and local governmental websites but also with local businesses as services move entirely to a digital format momentarily. All websites need to be fully accessible to meet the needs of people with disabilities and consumers. State AT Programs can work to ensure full accessibility of these websites.
- Finally, partnerships need to be created to find creative solutions to getting assistive technology into the hands of consumers during a time of social distancing. This will take funds to work outside regular modes of distributing AT along with increased needs and cost to the sanitization of the assistive technology our programs are providing for consumers.

The nationwide network of Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology (PAAT) programs in every state and territory use AT Act funds to provide needed advocacy services to children and adults with disabilities. Every PAAT program works with families, medical providers, schools, employers, and communities to ensure that individuals have access to the assistive technology they need for employment, education, and needed services and supports. The COVID pandemic has increased the need for this advocacy by moving employment and education into a virtual environment, along with how children and adults with disabilities are accessing critically needed services and supports that allow them to live full lives in the community. Addressing this increased demand requires additional funds and NDRN supports a \$50 million allocation for AT Act programs in the stimulus package that would enable the nationwide network of PAAT program to fully address these critical advocacy demands.

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 or Eric Buehlmann at eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Audrey Busch
Executive Director
ATAP

Eric Buehlmann
Deputy Executive Director Public Policy
NDRN