



May 4, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Technology and Telecommunications Task Force, the undersigned organizations are writing to ask for your support for the inclusion of \$50 million in the FY 2022 Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations (LHHS) bill for the Assistive Technology (AT) Act Programs. Funding provided through the AT Act supports programs that ensure people with disabilities have access to and are able to acquire the assistive technology, devices, and services they need to live, work, and attend school in their communities.

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of more than 100 national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Technology and Telecommunications Task Force focuses on national policy regarding matters of telecommunications and technology, including assistive technology, in order to help move society toward our ultimate goal of full inclusion for all people with a disability.

The AT Act programs provide critical funding to ensure people with disabilities can access and acquire the assistive technology devices and services they need to live, work, and attend school in their communities. During the COVID pandemic, these services are even more greatly needed and in high demand to address social isolation, remote learning and working, and much more. The AT Act programs are one of the few disability programs to not receive any additional funding in the COVID relief and stimulus bills enacted thus far to support the increased demand for their direct services, and the programs are in dire need of additional financial support. Funding the AT Act at \$50 million would allow **all** programs to provide the full breadth of services required by the law, and also address the needs surfacing due to the COVID pandemic.

When the Assistive Technology Act was reauthorized by the Congress in 2004, Statewide AT Programs became responsible for providing more services that bring assistive technology directly into the hands of those who need it. AT Act Programs are required to operate statewide programs that are available for persons with all types of disabilities, of all ages, in all environments (education, employment, community living, and information technology). State programs are required to provide a continuum of services that increase awareness of and access to assistive technology, including state financing activities (such as financial loans, cooperative buys, funds of last resort, etc.), device reutilization (including recycling, repair, refurbishment and device exchange), device loan/borrowing, and device demonstration services. These state level activities are provided in addition to previously required activities, including information and assistance, training, technical assistance, and coordination and collaboration. While individuals with disabilities, their families, and guardians are the primary beneficiaries of services, the AT Act requires Statewide AT Act Programs to provide a wide range of services and supports to other stakeholders such as educators, employers, health care providers, rehabilitation providers, and technology experts including web designers, procurement officials and AT manufacturers and vendors. While the 2004 amendments to the AT Act have had a positive effect by improving the consistency and availability of a continuum of services nationally, it is unfortunate that the increased requirement to implement seven, rather than four, activities has not been met with the full amount of resources needed to meet the intent of the law.

The nationwide network of Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology (PAAT) programs in every state, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, four territories, and a fifty-seventh agency serving the Hopi, Navaho, and San Juan Southern Paiute tribes in the Four Corners region has been similarly under-funded. Twenty-six programs receive a minimum allotment of just \$50,000 and all the territories receive \$30,000. Larger states such as Pennsylvania (\$150,481), Georgia (\$123,602), Florida (\$250,264), and Ohio (\$137,349) receive insufficient funding when compared to their populations. The PAAT programs use these very limited funds to provide needed advocacy services to children and adults with disabilities. Every PAAT program conducts trainings and works with families, medical providers, schools, employers, and communities to ensure that individuals have access to the assistive technology they need.

Thank you again for your efforts on behalf of the Assistive Technology Act, which is so important to Americans with disabilities and to serving the growing needs during this public health crisis. We look forward to working with you in the coming months as Congress works to finalize the FY 2022 appropriations process. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the CCD Technology and Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs: Eric Buehlmann, eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org; Audrey Busch, audrey.busch@ataporg.org; Joseph Nahra, joseph.nahra@powerslaw.com; Clark Rachfal, crachfal@acb.org; or Mark Richert mark@aerbvi.org.

Sincerely,

Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
NDRN
American Council of the Blind
Perkins School for the Blind
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

American Association on Health and Disability
American Foundation for the Blind
American Network of Community Options & Resources (ANCOR)
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Printing House for the Blind
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
Autistic Advocacy
Brain Injury Association of America
CEC: Innovations in Special Education Technology Division
Center for Learner Equity
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
CommunicationFIRST
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Cure SMA
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)
Easterseals
Epilepsy Foundation
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Lutheran Services in America - Disability Network
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Down Syndrome Congress
Spina Bifida Association
TASH
Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc. ("TDI")
The Advocacy Institute
The Arc of the United States
United Spinal Association
World Institute on Disability
RespectAbility