



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

April 6, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
135 Dirksen Senator Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Moore Capito:

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 \$49 million in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 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, the importance of these services only grew in importance, specifically when addressing social isolation, remote learning and working, and much more. In the post-pandemic world, these COVID-driven needs still exist in addition to the demand for services continuing to rise. **Funding the AT Act at \$49 million would allow all programs to provide the full breadth of services required by the law, and also address the increased demand for these direct services.**

All 50 states, 4 U.S. territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico receive formula grant funding under the Assistive Technology (AT) Act of 2004. These 56 grantees are required to carry out a continuum of specified state level and state leadership activities 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. These services are available for persons with all types of disabilities, all ages, in all environments (education, employment, community living and information technology). While families and guardians are the primary beneficiaries of services for individuals with disabilities, State and Territory AT Act programs provide a wide range of services and supports to other targeted individuals such as educators, employers, health care providers, rehabilitation providers, and technology experts, including web designers, procurement officials and AT manufacturers and vendors. While the 2022 reauthorization maintained the key components of the direct services program, the most important part of the reauthorization was to increase the capacity of AT Act Programs. In order to fulfill this intent, the reauthorization needs to be met with increased resources to achieve the intent of the reauthorization.

The nationwide network of Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology (PAAT) programs in every state, the District of Columbia, five territories, and a fifty-seventh agency serving the Hopi, Navaho, and San Juan Southern Paiute tribes in the Four Corners region has been similarly underfunded. Twenty-four programs receive a minimum allotment of just \$50,000 and all the territories receive \$30,000. Larger states such as Pennsylvania (\$152,347), Georgia (\$126,350), Florida (\$255,590), and Ohio (\$139,103) 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 AT 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 2023 appropriations process. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the CCD Technology and Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs: Audrey Busch-Treussard, audrey.busch-treussard@ataporg.org; Joseph Nahra, joseph.nahra@powerslaw.com; Clark Rachfal, crachfal@acb.org; or Laura Kaloi, lkaloi@stridepolicy.com.

Sincerely,

Access Ready
Allies for Independence
American Association on Health and Disability
American Music Therapy Association
ANCOR (American Network of Community Options and Resources)
ASAN.
Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA)
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autistic People of Color Fund
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Cara L. Coleman Family Voices

CAST
CommunicationFIRST
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)
Cure SMA
Division of Learning Disabilities - Council of Exceptional Children
Epilepsy Foundation
Lakeshore Foundation
LDA American
Muscular Dystrophy Association
Perkins School for the Blind
The Advocacy Institute
The Arc of the United States
United Spinal Association
WID