



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

March 18, 2016

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

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 \$38 million in the FY 2017 House 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 assure people with disabilities have access to and acquisition of the assistive technology 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 Telecommunications and Technology 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 for programs that assure people with disabilities can access and acquire of the assistive technology services they need to live, work, and attend school in their communities. We greatly appreciate that the FY 2016 budget maintained provided an increase of \$1 million for the AT Act programs. While states are very grateful for this increased amount, unfortunately this amount still does not meet the demand for these important programs nor does it fully fund the program according to the statute. Fully funding the AT Act at \$38 million would allow the programs to provide the full breadth of services required by the law.

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, 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 buy, 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 Protection and Advocacy (P&A) for Assistive Technology program has been similarly underfunded, with 28 state P&As funded under the program receiving a minimum allotment of just \$50,000. Territories receive \$20,000. Larger states such as Pennsylvania (\$124,700), Georgia (\$96,000), Florida (\$186,500), and Ohio (\$113,000) receive insufficient funding given their large populations. The PAAT program uses these very limited funds to provide protection and advocacy services to children and adults with disabilities. Every P&A 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. Given the current level of demand experienced by P&A programs -- as well as the heightened demand for the assistive technology needs of returning wounded veterans and an aging population -- fully funding the AT Act is critical.

Thank you again for your efforts on behalf of Assistive Technology Act, which is so important to Americans with disabilities. We look forward to working with you in the coming months as Congress works to finalize the FY2017 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; Mark Richert, 4justice@concentric.net; Audrey Busch, audrey.busch@ataporg.org; Sara Rosta, sara.rosta@PPSV.com ; or Michael Brogioli, mbrogioli@resna.org.

Sincerely,

Association of Assistive Technology Programs
National Disability Rights Network
Perkins
American Foundation for the Blind
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America