

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Representative Dan Saddler

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Sponsor Statement

House Bill 219, Version B

“An Act repealing the assistive technology loan guarantee and interest subsidy program; and providing for an effective date.”

Alaska has an impressive record of enacting policies that support the well-being of all its citizens, including those experiencing physical or mental disabilities.

One way this generous spirit found expression came in 1995, when the state sought and received a \$500,000 federal grant to be utilized to back loans, through a financial institution, for individuals with disabilities, so they could buy assistive technology that could help them to get or keep a job, or to live more independently in our state.

The Alaska Legislature chose to use the funding to establish the “assistive technology loan guarantee fund.” This fund was intended to guarantee the principal amount – or subsidize the interest rate – of loans to Alaskans so they could buy assistive technology, such as wheelchairs, computers, prosthetics, hearing aids, communication devices or software. However, despite the Legislature’s good intentions, few people have taken advantage of this program since its inception.

HB 219 seeks to fulfill the grant’s original aim by repealing this moribund grant program, and directing the fund’s \$450,000 balance to Assistive Technology of Alaska, the non-profit empowered to administer such grants. Repeal of the underlying statute will be contingent on the Legislature’s reappropriation of these funds, through separate budget legislation.

Passing HB 219 to repeal AS 23.15.125 would remove outdated statutory barriers preventing individuals from utilizing funds designated to help Alaskans across the state access assistive technology, and support them in leading more productive and independent lives.