



January 15, 2024

Representative Dan Saddler  
State Capitol Room 204  
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Representative Saddler,

I am writing to you as the chair of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee, in support of the amendment to Alaska State House Bill No. 65(HES) enacted in 1995 and the transfer of the money appropriated to Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA).

Two key points underlie our support:

1. For the last 28 years, the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program, which the funds are currently assigned to, has proven to be an inefficient and unsuccessful model to help Alaskans get the AT they need not only in Alaska, but in the other States where similar programs had been enacted as well.
2. ATLA has a successful track record at helping Alaskans get the AT that they need, using other, more efficient models.

It therefore makes the most sense to transfer these funds from a program with a long history of difficulties to programs with a long history of successes.

The main issues with Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program are not in the efforts by DVR to implement the program, which were creative and substantial. Rather, it is that the very model is overly cumbersome and inflexible.

Assistive technology is critical for Alaskans to live healthy, productive, independent, and dignified lives, and to participate in education, the labour market and civic life. Assistive technology reduces the need for formal health and support services, long-term care and the work of caregivers. Without assistive technology, people are often excluded, isolated, and locked into poverty, thereby increasing the impact of disease and disability on a person, their family, and society. The need has only increased as the internet and other technologies have become indispensable to accessing services and participating in work and community.

Over the past three years, ATLA has helped 1,978 Alaskans to access the AT they need by providing a demonstration or short-term loans of the equipment. Of those, approximately 81% have been able to receive, at

least partially, some of the needed equipment through reutilization or direct acquisition afforded through leveraged funding sources. However, there were still many Alaskans that either did not meet the qualifications or the equipment was not allowable within those subsidiary programs. The reappropriation of these funds will help ATLA meet Alaskan's increased need for AT.

The State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee supports Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA), as the state implementing agency, to receive the remaining balance of the unrestricted Title I funding to be used toward ATLA's current AT Act services or to develop new programs that adhere to AT Act requirements.

Sincerely,

*Travis Noah*

Travis Noah  
Chair, State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee



February 2, 2024

Representative Dan Saddler  
State Capitol Room 204  
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Representative Saddler,

The Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan Fund (ATLF) was established in 1995 by Alaska Statute AS.23.15.125. The main services of the ATLF were, in partnership with a participating bank, to offer low interest loans to low-income Alaskans with disabilities so they could purchase needed assistive technology (AT). The ATLF was created using a one-time injection of federal funds from the Assistive Technology Act. The funds were to be used to guarantee the loans and /or buy down the interest rates so the participating bank could offer loans to Alaskans who would not otherwise qualify and pay back the loan due to their low income or credit history. While this may sound like a “good idea on paper,” there are several critical flaws in the design of the program that make it a highly inefficient use of the funds. Problems were first noted in 1997, just 2 years after the program started. The program’s flaws were further exacerbated in more recent years when interest rates dropped to historically low levels, as it made the main feature of the program, the interest rate buy-down, almost useless and makes finding the few clients who can benefit even more difficult.

The Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has tried numerous ways over the years to make the program efficient and effective, but the only way we’ve found to find clients who can benefit is by spending a lot of resources in marketing and screening clients, to find the few that qualify. Because of this, we have not made a new loan in many years.

It is clear to us is that the most efficient use of the funds would be to move them to the Alaskan non-profit agency Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). ATLA has an excellent track record with similar services and an efficient plan for how the ATLF money will be used to help low-income Alaskans with disabilities get the AT they need. This plan leverages all the other complimentary work that ATLA is doing and has been approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Social Services’ Administration for Community Living, the agency that oversees the AT Act.

ATLA’s use of the funds will be efficiently and effectively monitored by that federal agency and DVR using existing mechanisms, including current quarterly and annual reports on its AT Act

services. This will remove unneeded administrative costs to the state, and leverage both existing, successful AT programs and efficient monitoring mechanisms. Most importantly, it will result in more Alaskans with disabilities getting the AT they need.

Both I and Commissioner Munoz appreciate your support to actually make this happen. This change will allow ATLA to manage this program internally and assist Alaskans with disabilities in need of Assistive Technology.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Duane G. Mayes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Duane G Mayes MS CRCC CDMS  
Director, Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



February 6, 2024

Dear Senator Sadler,

On behalf of the Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs, this letter fully supports the proposed amendment to Alaska State House Bill No. 65(HES) enacted in 1995 by appropriating the remaining funds to Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). The original Title I funds were afforded to the State of Alaska through the federal S.2561 Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 and allocated to establish the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program administered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. However, over the past 28 years, the enacted program has been substantially underutilized, as it requires the applicant to qualify for a traditional bank loan and retain ownership of the equipment, regardless of its usefulness. While Alaskans have a growing need to obtain assistive technology (AT), the remaining funds would be more functional and beneficial by supplementing currently proven activities administered by ATLA.

Assistive technologies—from smart home systems to speech-generating devices—are critical to ensure Alaskans with disabilities can live, work, and participate in their communities independently. The Assistive Technology Act, first enacted in 1998 and recently reauthorized as the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, assures people with disabilities can access and acquire vital services and technologies. The demand for AT is more significant than ever. For example, during the pandemic, people with disabilities faced disproportionate barriers to accessing and retaining employment and social connections. Moreover, over 40 million people live with a disability, and estimates indicate that 77 million will be 65 years old or older by 2030.

ATLA remains one of the only nonprofits to provide services to all Alaskans, regardless of age, location, income, or diagnosis. The reappropriation of these funds and bipartisan legislation will ensure that ATLA can meet the increased urgency for AT and help improve the quality of life for Alaskans with disabilities. The additional funding would strengthen and sustain identified gaps in services or unavailable devices needed to support the four state-level activities outlined in the AT Act, which include equipment acquisition through leveraged funding resources, reutilization, loan, and demonstration. Finally, it will assist in establishing technical assistance support and continued innovation and collaboration through valued partnerships to support Alaskans who experience a disability.

The Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs strongly supports that the state's assistive technology resource agency, ATLA, receive the unrestricted Title I fund balance to afford Alaskans consistency of service, maintain agency capacity, develop new and ongoing activities, and serve those that experience unmet AT needs.



Should there be any additional questions, please contact the Executive Director of ATAP, Audrey Busch at [Audrey.busch@ataporg.org](mailto:Audrey.busch@ataporg.org).

Sincerely

*Audrey Busch*

Audrey Busch  
Executive Director  
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs



February 6, 2024

Dear Senator Sadler,

On behalf of the undersigned Section 4 Assistive Technology Act Program, I am writing this letter in support of the proposed amendment to Alaska State House Bill No. 219 (HES) enacted in 1995 by appropriating the remaining funds to Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). The original Title I funds were afforded to the State of Alaska through the federal S.2561 Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 and allocated to establish the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program administered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. However, over the past 28 years, the enacted program has been substantially underutilized, as it requires the applicant to qualify for a traditional bank loan and retain ownership of the equipment, regardless of its usefulness. While Alaskans have a growing need to obtain assistive technology (AT) to meet a number of needs, the remaining funds would be more functional and beneficial by supplementing currently proven activities administered by ATLA.

Assistive technologies—from smart home systems to speech-generating devices—are critical to ensure Alaskans with disabilities can live, work, and participate in their communities independently. The Assistive Technology Act, first enacted in 1998 and recently reauthorized as the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, assures people with disabilities can access and acquire vital services and technologies. The demand for AT is more significant than ever. For example, during the pandemic, people with disabilities faced disproportionate barriers to accessing and retaining education and employment and social connections. These needs persist, particularly in a state where many individuals are isolated from supports and services in rural and remote communities.

ATLA remains one of the only nonprofits to provide services to all Alaskans, regardless of age, location, income, or diagnosis. The reappropriation of these funds and bipartisan legislation will ensure that ATLA can meet the increased urgency for AT and help improve the quality of life for Alaskans with disabilities. The additional funding would strengthen and sustain identified gaps in services or unavailable devices needed to support the four state-level activities outlined in the AT Act, which include equipment acquisition through leveraged funding resources, reutilization, loan, and demonstration. Finally, it will assist in establishing technical assistance support and continued innovation and collaboration through valued partnerships to support Alaskans who experience a disability.

**Articulate Speech and Language Therapy, LLC**  
**4325 Laurel Street, Suite 100**



As a practicing pediatric speech-language pathologist in Anchorage, Alaska, ATLA staff has been proactive and supportive of innovative solutions for my clients and their families who experience significant speech disabilities requiring Augmentative and Alternative (AAC) Communication solutions. ATLA is committed to collaborating and working together to provide quality assistive technology selection through trial and loan devices, acquisition of equipment, implementation of AT and follow-up. They have also been instrumental in presenting information about assistive technology to an interdisciplinary leadership training program cohort for years, Alaska Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Without Walls through the University of Alaska Anchorage. As a result of the positive outcomes my families and mentored fellows have experienced, including access to speech generating devices to meet communication needs, and increased awareness and understanding of AT resources available in Alaska, the proposed funding reallocation has my full support. I look forward to collaborating with the team in any way that would be helpful.

I fully support the state's assistive technology resource agency, ATLA, receives the unrestricted Title I fund balance to afford Alaskans consistency of service, maintain agency capacity, develop new and ongoing activities, and serve those that experience unmet AT needs. It has been my privilege to work with ATLA for many years and they continue to be an invaluable resource to our Alaskan community.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me directly with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Spilker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anna Spilker, MS, CCC-SLP  
Articulate Speech and Language Therapy, LLC  
[anna@articulatetherapy.com](mailto:anna@articulatetherapy.com)  
907-569-5665





THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

**Department of Health**

SENIOR AND DISABILITY SERVICES  
Governor's Council on Disabilities  
and Special Education

550 W 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 1220  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
Main: 907.269.8990  
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February 7, 2024

Representative Dan Saddler  
State Capitol Building, Room 204  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 219—REPEAL ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN PROGRAM

Representative Saddler,

We recognize and thank you for your work in initiating HB 219—Repeal Assistive Technology Loan Program and are pleased to offer a letter of support. If passed, we understand the bill will allow for the transfer of the remaining fund balance from the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program to the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) so it can disburse the funds to ATLA, who will get assistive technology into the hands of Alaskans that need it.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE or the Council) fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. As the state DD Council, the Council works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and other state agencies to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families receive the services and supports that they need, as well as participate in the planning and design of those services.

Our council membership is composed of self-advocates and family members of individuals with intellectual and development disabilities (60%), as well as agency and partner representatives (40%). One of the duties of the state DD Council is providing comments on proposed recommendations that may have an impact on individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families. Our Council uses the Developmental Disabilities Shared Vision (DD Vision) to guide all work in supporting Alaskans with disabilities toward integrated living within their community:

*"Alaskans share a vision of a flexible system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community. Our vision includes supported families, professional staff and services available throughout the state now and into the future."*

**HB 219 supports the DD Vision.**

The Council has made HB 219 a legislative priority and have provided you with a DRAFT copy of our position paper (see attachment). ATLA has provided excellent quality of service to the people they serve and to the community in general. Through collaborative efforts, ATLA provides assistive technology information, assessments, services, and access to devices for consumers by working with our Council and community members to ensure people with disabilities have the skills and technology needed to succeed and be more independent in their home, community, employment, or educational environments. ATLA staff has been proactive and supportive of innovative solutions for Alaskans with disabilities. They are committed to collaborating and working together to provide quality assistive technology selection, acquisition, implementation, and follow-up. We believe that ATLA will make good use of the remaining AT funds.

The Council strongly supports the passage of HB 219 to Repeal the Assistive Technology Loan Program and stands ready to support this effort on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities who need assistive technology. We intend to provide public testimony at bill hearings whenever possible.

Sincerely,

A black and white image of a handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Caitlin Poindexter". The signature is written on a dark, textured background.

Caitlin Poindexter  
GCDSE Legislative Committee Chair

A black and white image of a handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patrick Reinhart". The signature is written in black ink on a plain white background.

Patrick Reinhart  
GCDSE Executive Director

Attachment: 2024 Assistive Technology Position Paper DRAFT.

## Repeal Assistive Technology Loan Program



### What

Support HB 219 the “Repeal Assistive Technology Loan Program” and transfer the fund balance to the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation so it can disburse the funds to ATLA, to get assistive technology into the hands of Alaskans that need it.

### **Two key points underlie our support:**

1. Alaska has assigned assistive technology (AT) funds to the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program for the last 28 years. This program has proven to be an inefficient and unsuccessful model to help Alaskans get the AT they need to live independently and/or be employed when needing job accommodations. Many Alaskans do not understand how to access the low interest loans, and many Alaskan banks do not understand the program and how to market it.
2. Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA) has multi-decade successful track record of helping Alaskans get the AT they need. Alaska can simplify the process by making approximately **\$500,000** of the unused funds available as grants and opportunities to access AT through ATLA.

### **Why is Assistive Technology Important?**

Assistive technology is critical for Alaskans with disabilities to live healthy, productive, independent, and dignified lives and to participate in education, the labor market, and civic life.

The need for AT has only increased as the internet and other technologies have become indispensable to accessing services and participating in work and community.

Assistive technology:

- Reduces the need for formal health and support services, long-term care, and direct service professionals.
- Reduces exclusion, isolation, and poverty in people with disabilities.
- Reduces the impact of disease and disability on the person, their family and society.

### **Why the funds should be transferred to ATLA:**

Over the past three years, ATLA has helped **1,978** Alaskans to access the AT they need by providing a demonstration or short-term loans of the equipment. Of those, approximately **81%** have been able to receive, at least partially, some of the needed equipment through reutilization or direct acquisition afforded through leveraged funding sources.

However, under the management of the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program, to which the funds are currently assigned, many Alaskans still did not meet the qualifications, or the equipment was not allowable within those subsidiary programs. Reappropriating these funds will help ATLA meet Alaskans increased need for AT.

### **Examples of Assistive Technology include but are not limited to:**

- Speech assistance and daily living software
- Alternative keyboards and mice
- Prosthetics
- Mounting systems
- Automated control devices
- Hearing devices
- Screen readers
- Independent Living Tools

The Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education supports Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA) to become the state implementing agency and receive the remaining balance of the unrestricted Title I funding; it aligns with ATLA's current AT Act services which can include developing new programs that adhere to AT Act requirements.

### **Ask**

Please support HB 219, the Repeal Assistive Technology Loan Program in support of people with disabilities and transfer the fund balance to the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide a grant contract through ATLA that can be better utilized by Alaskans who need AT devices and supports.



# DISABILITY LAW CENTER

3330 Arctic Boulevard, Suite 103  
Anchorage, AK 99503

[www.dlcak.org](http://www.dlcak.org)

February 7, 2024

Dear Senator Sadler,

On behalf of the undersigned, this letter fully supports the proposed amendment to Alaska State House Bill No. 219(HES) enacted in 1995 by appropriating the remaining funds to Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). The original Title I funds were afforded to the State of Alaska through the federal S.2561 Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 and allocated to establish the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program administered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. However, over the past 28 years, the enacted program has been substantially underutilized, as it requires the applicant to qualify for a traditional bank loan and retain ownership of the equipment, regardless of its usefulness. While Alaskans have a growing need to obtain assistive technology (AT), the remaining funds would be more functional and beneficial by supplementing currently proven activities administered by ATLA.

Assistive technologies—from smart home systems to speech-generating devices—are critical to ensure Alaskans with disabilities can live, work, and participate in their communities independently. The Assistive Technology Act, first enacted in 1998 and recently reauthorized as the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, assures people with disabilities can access and acquire vital services and technologies. The demand for AT is more significant than ever. For example, during the pandemic, people with disabilities faced disproportionate barriers to accessing and retaining employment and social connections. Moreover, over 40 million people live with a disability, and estimates indicate that 77 million will be 65 years old or older by 2030.

ATLA remains one of the only nonprofits to provide services to all Alaskans, regardless of age, location, income, or diagnosis. The reappropriation of these funds and bipartisan legislation will ensure that ATLA can meet the increased urgency for AT and help improve the quality of life for Alaskans with disabilities. The additional funding would strengthen and sustain identified gaps in services or unavailable devices needed to support the four state-level activities outlined in the AT Act, which include equipment acquisition through leveraged funding resources, reutilization, loan, and demonstration. Finally, it will assist in establishing technical assistance support and continued innovation and collaboration through valued partnerships to support Alaskans who experience a disability.

As a partner organization, the Disability Law Center of Alaska has recognized that ATLA staff has been proactive and supportive of innovative solutions for Alaskans with disabilities. They are committed to collaborating and working together to provide quality assistive technology

selection, acquisition, implementation and follow-up. As a result of the positive outcomes our agency has experienced, the proposed funding reallocation has Disability Law Center's full support. We look forward to collaborating with the team in any way that would be helpful.

On behalf of the Disability Law Center, I fully support the state's assistive technology resource agency, ATLA, receives the unrestricted Title I fund balance to afford Alaskans consistency of service, maintain agency capacity, develop new and ongoing activities, and serve those that experience unmet AT needs.

Sincerely,



David C. Fleurant  
Executive Director

Providence Pediatric Neurosciences  
3340 Providence Dr Ste A565  
Anchorage, Ak 99508  
Phone: 907-212-2321  
Fax: 907-212-8499



Dear Senator Sadler,

On behalf of the undersigned Section 4 Assistive Technology Act Program, this letter fully supports the proposed amendment to Alaska State House Bill No. 219(HES) enacted in 1995 by appropriating the remaining funds to Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA). The original Title I funds were afforded to the State of Alaska through the federal S.2561 Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 and allocated to establish the Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee and Interest Subsidy Program administered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. However, over the past 28 years, the enacted program has been substantially underutilized, as it requires the applicant to qualify for a traditional bank loan and retain ownership of the equipment, regardless of its usefulness. While Alaskans have a growing need to obtain assistive technology (AT), the remaining funds would be more functional and beneficial by supplementing currently proven activities administered by ATLA.

Assistive technologies—from smart home systems to speech-generating devices—are critical to ensure Alaskans with disabilities can live, work, and participate in their communities independently. The Assistive Technology Act, first enacted in 1998 and recently reauthorized as the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, assures people with disabilities can access and acquire vital services and technologies. The demand for AT is more significant than ever. For example, during the pandemic, people with disabilities faced disproportionate barriers to accessing and retaining employment and social connections. Moreover, over 40 million people live with a disability, and estimates indicate that 77 million will be 65 years old or older by 2030.

ATLA remains one of the only nonprofits to provide services to all Alaskans, regardless of age, location, income, or diagnosis. The reappropriation of these funds and bipartisan legislation will ensure that ATLA can meet the increased urgency for AT and help improve the quality of life for Alaskans with disabilities. The additional funding would strengthen and sustain identified gaps in services or unavailable devices needed to support the four state-level activities outlined in the AT Act, which include equipment acquisition through leveraged funding resources, reutilization, loan, and demonstration. Finally, it will assist in establishing technical assistance support and continued innovation and collaboration through valued partnerships to support Alaskans who experience a disability.

As a speech-language pathologist with Providence Pediatric Neurodevelopment Clinic, my position is to assist an interdisciplinary team in assessing and diagnosing a range of developmental disorders not limited to, but including autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and various genetic conditions/disorders ranging from birth to age eight. Our secondary goal is to provide resources to families such as therapies (occupational, speech-language, physical, behavioral health, etc.) and care to ensure every patient is able to functionally communicate, participate in activities of daily living (ADLs) and improve their quality of life. Many of our patients have complex medical and

communication needs, some of which are not able to be met with the current equipment available in the state of Alaska. I have personally worked with the ATLA team to improve access to a variety of devices, specifically relating to augmentative and alternative communication.

ATLA staff has been proactive and supportive of innovative solutions for Alaskans with disabilities. They are committed to collaborating and working together to provide quality assistive technology selection, acquisition, implementation and follow-up. As a result of the positive outcomes myself and my clinic has experienced, the proposed grant application has my full support. We look forward to collaborating with the team in any way that would be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily N. Atton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Emily Atton M.S., CCC-SLP  
Speech-Language Pathologist  
*Providence Pediatric Neurodevelopment Clinic*