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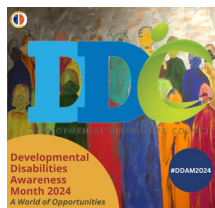
**From:** Kokoszka, Jamie J (DOH) <jamie.kokoszka@alaska.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, March 22, 2024 10:03 AM  
**To:** House Finance  
**Cc:** Reinhart, Patrick J (DOH)  
**Subject:** HB 219 Repeal Assistive Technology Loan Program  
**Attachments:** 2024 Assistive Technology Position Paper.pdf

Dear House Finance:

To Representatives Edgmon, Foster, and Johnson,

It is our understanding that there is a hearing scheduled for today, March 22<sup>nd</sup> at 1:30pm with no public testimony. The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education would like to extend its full support of this bill as it is one of the Council's legislative priorities. Attached is the Position Paper that Council members presented during their legislative visits in February 2024. The Council stands ready to assist the legislature if the bill should pass. We would like to offer public testimony whenever possible. Please contact Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director at [Patrick.reinhart@alaska.gov](mailto:Patrick.reinhart@alaska.gov) if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time,



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## 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 **\$447,000** 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.

## Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education and Statewide Independent Living Council

### 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.