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January 14, 1992

**Representative Mark Boyer  
House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
Mail Stop 3100, Capitol Rm 411**

**Dear Representative Boyer,**

**The Southcentral Coalition for Assistive Technology strongly supports the proposal for the "TOOLS FOR LIFE" assistive technology guaranteed loan fund. This loan fund will enable many Alaskans with disabilities to become integrated and productive members of their communities. We also strongly suggest that a Grant Program be incorporated into the proposed legislation to accommodate those special cases where assistive technology is needed for independent living and the consumer has no ability to pay back a loan. The proposed legislation will assist Alaskans with disabilities in their efforts to become working productive members of their communities and will assist families in their efforts to purchase needed equipment for their children with disabilities.**

**Several very successful loan programs have been developed in the Lower 48. We strongly suggest that these programs be reviewed as examples as the Alaska program is legislated and developed.**

**In Maine, The Adaptive Equipment Loan Program (AELP) has been in operation since 1988. AELP has closed a total of 129 loans effective July 1991 at \$1,286,510 and have only experienced one default.**

**In another program Kurxwell/Xerox joined forces with the American Foundation for the Blind in a private-public cooperative venture to make \$2,000,000 available to blind consumers for purchase of reading machines. Over 85 loans were made through the Bank of Boston with no defaults.**

**The California Department of Rehabilitation administers two assistive technology financing programs: 1) The Handicapped Transportation Loan Guarantee Program and 2) The Assistive Technology Guarantee Program. Both programs have been successful and a third program is being considered for fleet van purchases for adult consumers.**

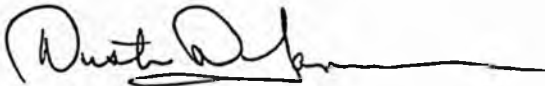
**We reviewed the work draft of the bill dated 1/2/92, and have some concerns regarding the consumer qualifications outlined for loan eligibility and have some questions regarding specific qualifications (refer to the enclosed Work Draft):**

- (1) Specifically how will a disability determination be made?**
- (2) Why a four year payback requirement?**
- (4) What is a less costly source?**
- (5) Is there any way to provide the needed technology when the person with the disability or their family does not have the means to pay back a loan?**
- (6) How does this deal with a consumer who needs a vehicle to become employed and is not working because they do not have transportation?**
- (d) A more specific definition of durable equipment, adaptive aids and assistive devices is needed.**

**We are confident that as this bill is written these qualifications will be reviewed and the final product will be a bill that will successfully provide appropriate financial assistance to people with disabilities. We would be happy to assist in the development of this bill and would be available to provide information throughout the process.**

**Thank you for your efforts to provide critically needed services for people with disabilities in Alaska.**

**Technologically yours,**



**Dustin D. Farnum  
TOOLS FOR LIFE Committee  
Southcentral Coalition for Assistive Technology  
3610 Woodland Park Drive, Suite 900  
Anchorage, Alaska 99517  
(907) 248-4777**

# Alaska State Legislature

REPRESENTATIVE  
MARK BOYER

VICE-CHAIRMAN  
HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE



House of Representatives

FAIRBANKS

SUITE 205  
119 NORTH CUSHMAN STREET  
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99701-2879  
(907) 456-6473

JUNEAU

STATE CAPITOL  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-1182  
(907) 455-3466

February 3, 1992

Dustin D. Farnum  
TOOLS FOR LIFE Committee  
Southcentral Coalition for Assistive Technology  
3610 Woodland Park Drive, Suite 900  
Anchorage, AK 99517

Dear Dustin,

Thank you for your letter regarding HB 388, the assistive technology loan guarantee bill that I've sponsored. I appreciate your support and would like to respond to your questions.

(c)(1) How will a disability determination be made?

*The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has criteria already established for determining a disability. Since they will be administering the loan guarantee program, they will adopt regulations and establish criteria to make the determinations.*

(c)(2) Why a four year pay back requirement?

*This is an area I am reviewing with the hope of allowing a longer pay back period for vehicle purchases and similar high cost items.*

(c)(4) What is a less costly source?

*Some individuals may be able to obtain the assistive technology they need through programs such as Medicaid, Medicare or charitable foundations. DVR would inform potential applicants of possible sources.*

FAIRBANKS 20B

Dustin D. Farnum  
January 31, 1992  
Page Two

- (c)(5) Is there any way to provide the needed technology when the person with the disability or his/her family does not have the means to pay back a loan?

*Not through HB 388. I recognize the need for some type of grant program and would support it. However, the political realities often mean taking an "ideal" package and breaking it up into smaller parts that are easier for the legislature, as a whole, to accept. So the first step, in my opinion, is a loan guarantee program. It provides for greater self-sufficiency than a grant and does not have as large a fiscal impact on the state budget as a grant program. This is not to say that a grant program will never be established. Just not this year.*

- (c)(6) How does this deal with a consumer who needs a vehicle to become employed and is not working because he/she does not have transportation?

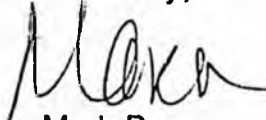
*I hope to change this provision to allow individuals to qualify if they have just been hired or received a written job offer.*

- (d) A more specific definition of durable equipment, adaptive aids and assistive devices is needed.

*DVR will establish more specific definitions. To place more specific definitions in statute would make it difficult to allow for unforeseen needs and new technologies.*

Thanks again for your thoughtful review of this bill. I look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Mark Boyer  
Representative

# Alaska State Legislature

REPRESENTATIVE  
MARK BOYER

VICE-CHAIRMAN  
HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE



House of Representatives

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Rep. Georgianna Lincoln, Co-Chair  
Rep. Pat Carney, Co-Chair  
House Health, Education and Social Services Committee

FROM: Rep. Mark Boyer *MB*

DATE: March 25, 1992

RE: HB 388, assistive technology loan guarantee

Attached is a draft committee substitute for HB 388 that makes the following changes to the original version:

- In answer to a concern that banks will have nothing to lose with a full guarantee program, subsection (b) provides, instead, for a 90% guarantee.
- Since a maximum four year payback of a loan could require prohibitive monthly payments for larger loans, subsection (c)(2) provides for a six year payback for loans of \$10,000 or more.
- The employment requirement for a vehicle loan in subsection (c)(6) was changed from 12 months to 90 days. The draft also clarified in this subsection that the employment requirement is for the applicant, not the handicapped person

Also attached is an explanation of the steps that would be taken to guarantee a loan and to provide an interest subsidy.

I would appreciate it if the HESS Committee could consider this legislation at your earliest convenience. The Senate version, SB 373, passed out of the Senate HESS Committee Tuesday.

FAIRBANKS 20B

*Sponsor*  *Statement*

# Alaska State Legislature

REPRESENTATIVE  
MARK BOYER  
  
VICE-CHAIRMAN  
HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE



House of Representatives

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March 27, 1992

## HB 388

### ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM

The Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee Program would be established to assist persons with disabilities, their families, or their employers to purchase durable equipment, adaptive aids, assistive devices, and vehicles, in order to obtain or maintain employment or to live more independently.

The program would allow the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to guarantee 90% of loans from private institutions so that persons with disabilities, their families, or their employers who cannot qualify for other assistance or private loans can obtain necessary adaptive technology. DVR would work with financial institutions to extend the time period during which a loan is paid back, as well as buy down interest rates, to make payments more manageable for consumers. An applicant's permanent fund dividend could be used as collateral.

#### HOW IT WORKS

The person with the disability in need of the assistive technology, or the person's family or employer, must be unable to obtain the needed equipment through DVR, Medicare, Medicaid, or other funding sources such as insurance companies. In making decisions about eligibility, DVR would also determine that the applicant was unable to obtain the equipment or device from a free or less costly source. In addition, the division would review the request to determine that the device or equipment would be appropriate or best-suited to the applicant's disability. The DVR office that does the initial screening would document its determinations.

Assuming the division's determinations indicate the applicant would be an appropriate candidate for this program, a loan application would be completed and signed by the applicant and forwarded to a local cooperating financial institution for review. The financial institution would evaluate the applicant's ability to make loan payments based on income and general credit history and return its recommendation to DVR. The division would then determine whether or not to guarantee 90% of the loan. They would also determine whether or not to subsidize the interest.

***Conditions for vehicle loan:***

A person with a disability, or that person's family, could apply for a vehicle loan. The loan program could be used for the purchase or modification of a vehicle to provide transportation for the individual with a disability. To be eligible, the person would have to be living independently or with a parent or guardian. An income limit would be set, and the applicant would have to be steadily employed a minimum of 90 days prior to the date of the initial loan request. This employment requirement is only for a vehicle loan.

## HB 388

### ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM

Step-by-step procedures for an assistive technology loan guarantee and interest subsidy:

1. The consumer (disabled individual or his/her family or employer) approaches DVR for loan guarantee to purchase assistive technology (durable equipment, an adaptive aid, an assistive device, or vehicle) in order to obtain or maintain employment or to live more independently.
2. DVR determines whether the desired assistive technology is appropriate to the disability. They also determine if there is another source of funding, such as Medicaid, Medicare, other federal programs or grants.
3. DVR has the consumer complete a loan application.
4. DVR forwards the application to a cooperating bank (or credit union).
5. The bank completes the credit check and makes a recommendation regarding the consumer's ability to repay the loan.
6. Based on the information provided by the bank, DVR decides whether or not to guarantee 90% of the loan. DVR may also choose to subsidize all or part of the interest to make the payments affordable for the consumer.
7. DVR informs the bank when they will guarantee a loan. The bank makes the loan, if they agree, to the consumer.
8. The state will hold in reserve a percentage of the total amount of guarantees. The actual percentage would be determined based on the risk of the loans and, as the program progresses, the history of defaults. (Note: similar programs in other states have shown very low default rates.)

POSITION PAPER: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Division Vocational Rehabilitation Bill Number HB 388

Bill Title "An act establishing a loan guarantee and interest rate subsidy program for assistive technology"

Sponsor Representative Boyer

Position Statement: Explain briefly what the bill does, its impacts and Department's position, i.e., a) support, b) do not support, c) neutral or d) oppose.

SEE ATTACHED EXPLANATION

APPROVED:

Director Keith J. Anderson Division Vocational Rehabilitation

Signature Keith J. Anderson Date 9 March 1992

Commissioner/Deputy Jerry Covey

Signature Mark William Lane Date 3/11/92

DOE POSITION

POSITION PAPER: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
House BILL NO. 388

THE DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:

The Department of Education supports this bill. It would meet an identified need by a group of individuals in the State of Alaska which is not now being addressed. It is recommended that the mechanics of the loan guarantee and interest subsidies be clarified. Other than student loans by the Commission on Post Secondary Education, the Department is not in the loan business, and does not have the infrastructure to support significant responsibilities in this area. This would best be handled by banking institutions.

WHAT THE BILL DOES:

This bill would provide two types of assistance to individuals who need help in order to acquire assistive devices:

LOAN GUARANTEE

This bill provides for the state to guarantee loans issued to individuals who need assistive devices. The process for accessing the guarantee is as follows:

1. The individual completes an application available from their local assistive technology office.
2. The local office personnel will evaluate the degree to which the individual meets pre-established criteria for acquiring a loan and certifies those who qualify.
3. The individual presents the certification, along with an application for a loan, to a bank of his/her choice.
4. The bank acts on the application. After the loan is made it is treated as any other loan. If the person defaults on the loan the state is liable to meet the outstanding obligation.

SUBSIDIZED INTEREST

Based on the ability of the individual to repay the loan, the state can subsidize the interest rate up to that required by the loaning institution.

IMPACT OF THE BILL:

If passed, this bill would make it possible for citizens of the State of Alaska to gain access to technological devices necessary for them to function more independently in their homes and communities. It is estimated that there are approximately 4,000 persons in the state who are in need of these devices. The cost of these devices vary broadly from a few dollars to several thousand dollars.

FISCAL NOTE:

No additional staff cost.



# Alaska State Legislature

Please enter into the record my testimony to the House HESS  
committee name

committee on HB 388, dated April 3, 1992.  
bill/subject

PLEASE RECORD MY STRONG SUPPORT FOR HB 388.  
 IN THIS AGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT  
 MANY ASSISTIVE & ADAPTIVE DEVICES HAVE BEEN  
 DEVELOPED THAT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO GREATLY  
 IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR A PERSON  
 WITH A DISABILITY. UNFORTUNATELY MANY OF THESE  
 PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO  
 ACQUIRE THESE DEVICES. THE BILL BEFORE YOU TODAY  
 HAS THE ABILITY TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE  
 IN THE LIFE OF MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.  
 THANKS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION.

Signed: ROGER BROBST  
 Testifier  
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY  
 Representing (Optional)  
Box 6069 SITKA 99825  
 Address  
747 - 6960  
 Phone No.



FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 388

Revision Date: 3-11-92

Department Affected: Education

Title: An Act establishing a loan guarantee and interest rate subsidy program for assistive technology.

BRU: Vocational Rehabilitation

Component: Assistive Technology

Sponsor: Representative Boyer

Requestor: (H) HESS

COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 

1	2	0	2
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Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL OPERATING	0	0	0	0	0	0

CAPITAL						
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REVENUE FUND SOURCE:						
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FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER FUND SOURCE:						
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

Estimate of current year impact:

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)

Prepared by: Stan Ridgeway  
Division: Vocational Rehabilitation

Phone: 465-2814  
Date: 3-11-92

Approved by Commissioner: *Jerry Covey*  
Agency: Education

Date: 3-12-92

FN & DOE

7-LS1720D  
Lauterbach  
3/24/92

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 388 ( )  
IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA  
SEVENTEENTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY

Offered:  
Referred:

Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVE BOYER

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 "An Act establishing a loan guarantee and interest rate subsidy program for assistive  
2 technology."

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

4 \* Section 1. AS 23.15 is amended by adding a new section to read:

5 Sec. 23.15.125. ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN GUARANTEE AND INTEREST  
6 SUBSIDY PROGRAM. (a) An assistive technology loan guarantee fund is established in the  
7 agency. The fund consists of money appropriated to it.

8 (b) Subject to (c) of this section, the agency may use money in the fund established  
9 under this section to guarantee 90 percent of the principal amount of a loan or to subsidize the  
10 interest rate of a loan guaranteed by the agency for appropriate assistive technology that is best  
11 suited for enabling

12 (1) a handicapped individual to obtain or maintain employment; or

13 (2) an individual having a physical or mental disability to live more  
14 independently.

1 (c) The agency may guarantee a loan or subsidize the interest rate of a loan guaranteed  
2 under this section if

3 (1) the loan is made to a handicapped or disabled person, a member of the  
4 person's family, or the employer or prospective employer of a handicapped or disabled person;

5 (2) the term of the loan does not exceed four years if the loan amount is less than  
6 \$10,000 and does not exceed six years if the loan amount is \$10,000 or greater;

7 (3) the loan is originated and serviced by a state or federally chartered financial  
8 institution located in the state;

9 (4) the agency determines that the person requesting the loan guarantee or subsidy  
10 is not able to obtain the needed assistive technology from a less costly source;

11 (5) the agency determines that the person or the family of a child reasonably can  
12 be expected to repay the loan given their expected income or other resources; and

13 (6) for a loan to purchase or modify a vehicle to provide transportation for a  
14 handicapped person, the applicant has been steadily employed for the 90 days immediately  
15 preceding the date of the loan application.

16 (d) In this section, "assistive technology" means durable equipment, adaptive aids, and  
17 assistive devices.

# INFO-BYTE #1

## March 1991

*Assistive Technologies of Alaska*

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### What is Assistive Technology?

- \* **Daily Living Aids:** Self-help devices that enable people who experience a disability to be more independent around the house - eating, cooking, maintenance, etc...
- \* **Augmentative Communication:** Electronic and non-electronic devices that help people without speech to express themselves verbally as well as receive communication.
- \* **Computer Applications:** Devices that enable people with disabilities to use a computer - headsticks, alternate keyboards, special software, etc...
- \* **Environmental Control Systems:** Usually electronic systems that enable someone to control household appliances, thermostat, TV, stereo, door locks, etc...
- \* **Home/Worksite Modifications:** Usually structural adaptations in the home or work such as ramps, raised tables, etc...
- \* **Prosthetics and Orthotics:** Braces, artificial limbs and other equipment that replaces or augments missing or malfunctioning body parts.
- \* **Seating and Positioning:** Accommodations to a wheelchair or other seating system to provide the user with greater body stability, support, posture, etc...
- \* **Aids for Vision/Hearing Impaired:** Aids for people with specific disabilities including magnifiers, Braille devices, hearing aids, etc...
- \* **Wheelchairs/Mobility aids:** Manual and electric wheelchairs, and other equipment that assists people with disabilities to move about.
- \* **Vehicle Modification:** Hand controls, wheelchair lifts, modified vans, etc...

*misc. back-up*

1192

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM

The Assistive Technology Loan Guarantee Program will be established to assist persons with disabilities or their employers to purchase durable equipment, adaptive aids, assistive devices, and vehicles, in order to obtain or maintain employment or to live more independently.

The program will allow the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to guarantee loans from private institutions so that persons with disabilities, their families, or their employers who cannot qualify for other assistance or private loans can obtain necessary adaptive technology. The Division is able to work with financial institutions to extend the time period during which the loan is to be paid back, as well as buy down interest rates, to make payments more manageable for consumers. An applicant's permanent fund dividend could be used as collateral.

### How it Works

The person with the disability in need of the equipment, or their family must be unable to obtain the needed equipment through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicare, Medicaid or other funding sources such as insurance companies. In making decisions about eligibility, the Division shall also determine that the person requesting a loan guarantee is unable to obtain the equipment or device from a free or less costly source. This must be documented by the DVR office that does the initial screening.

An application will be completed with the assistance of the local DVR staff, signed by the applicant and forwarded to the Juneau office for processing. DVR will be responsible for evaluating the applicant's ability to make loan payments based on income and general credit history.

The application will also be reviewed by the DVR to assure that the device or equipment is appropriate or best-suited to the applicant's disability.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation will make an initial determination for eligibility for the loan guarantee program and will contact the applicant and a local cooperating financial institution to initiate the lending institution's loan process. The lending institution

will then process the loan pursuant to their standard procedures by incorporating the Division's offer to guarantee the loan and buy down the interest rate to make the payments affordable. The lending institution then notifies the applicant and the Division when the loan is approved. The Division retains the discretion to deny the loan guarantee should the lender's review of the application reveal additional information which reflects negatively on the applicant's ability or willingness to repay the loan.

*Optional conditions for vehicle loan*

A person with a disability or their parent or legal guardian may apply for a vehicle loan. The loan program can be used for the purchase or modification of a vehicle to provide transportation for the disabled person. To be eligible, the person must be living independently or with their parents or guardians. An income limit will be set, and the applicant must be steadily employed a minimum of one year prior to date of initial loan request.

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES OF ALASKA

A report on the need for tools that enable Alaskans with disabilities to live, learn, work and play more independently



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES OF ALASKA

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This booklet has been paid for with federal funds as part of a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education, and was administered by the Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

For more information, additional copies or a non-print format of this document contact Assistive Technologies of Alaska at the following address:

**Assistive Technologies of Alaska**  
400 D Street, Suite 230  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
Phone: (907) 274-0138  
TDD: (907) 274-0517  
FAX: (907) 274-0516



## **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES OF ALASKA**

The goal of Assistive Technologies of Alaska (ATA) is to increase awareness of specialized equipment that can enhance the independence of people with disabilities, and to provide access to this equipment and technology.

ATA works in a direct and complementary role with other service providers. It plans to establish channels for information on new technologies and resources to be shared by various organizations and distributed to those who may benefit from them.

### **Four significant findings pave the way for ATA**

This document summarizes a study conducted in the spring of 1991 by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), at the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

Surveyors polled Alaska residents at random by telephone, uncovering the following four major findings. These findings are significant in setting the goals and directions for Assistive Technologies of Alaska.

- **Communications devices represent Alaska's largest single assistive technology need.**
- **Almost 4,000 Alaskans with disabilities lack current information regarding assistive technology.**
- **Alaska Natives exhibit a much higher need for assistive technology than do other races.**
- **Rural Alaskans with disabilities experience the greatest need for all forms of assistive technology.**

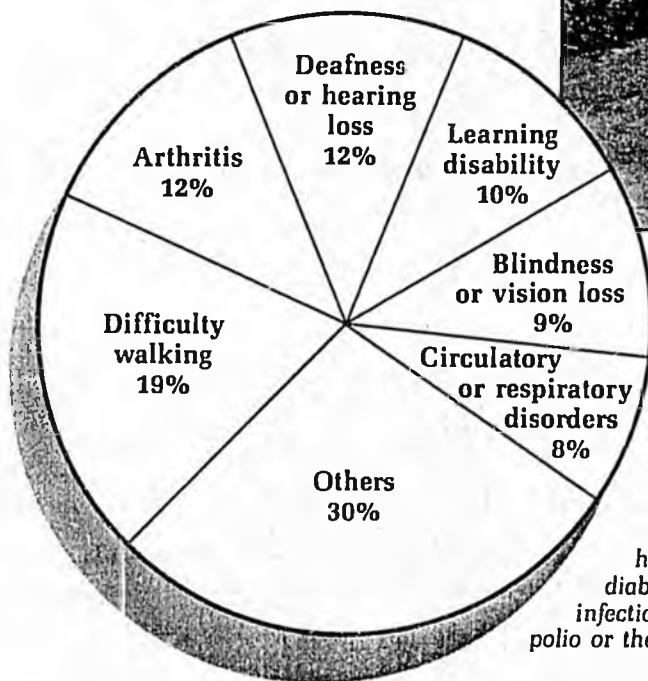
Complete survey results follow. It is important to note that the telephone poll may have resulted in low figures for deaf persons and those living in rural areas where telephone service is limited. The survey also excluded persons living in institutional settings. The numbers presented in this booklet are arrived at by a method known as statistical inferences.

## More than 22,000 Alaskans with disabilities live on their own

The Institute of Social and Economic Research, at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, found 22,220 Alaskans, 4 percent of the state population, have disabilities and live outside of institutions. Their survey found that many of these Alaskans could benefit from additional equipment or services to help them become more self sufficient.

### Difficulty in walking is the most common disability

Although Alaskans with disabilities often have more than one, the inability or difficulty in walking is the most common. This is followed by arthritis, deafness or hearing loss, learning disabilities, blindness or vision loss, and circulatory or respiratory problems.



*Other disabilities include those with emotional or communicative disorders, head injuries, developmental disabilities, diabetes, stroke, seizure, drug/alcohol addiction, infectious disease, amputation, Alzheimer's disease, polio or the HIV virus.*

## Many services can help Alaskans with disabilities improve their lifestyles

One of the central goals of persons with disabilities is to live a more independent lifestyle. Alaskans with disabilities expressed a need for many of the following services. Most of the 22,220 identified are getting medical care, but 15 percent (3,416 Alaskans) are not receiving adequate medical care.

Persons Who Need Service	Service	% Not Receiving Service
13,013	Newsletters informing them of services	81%
6,355	Support groups	76%
14,007	Equipment for daily living and information on new products	58%
10,548	A centralized information source	55%
14,092	Help getting benefits available to them	37%
11,456	Job training	32%
10,505	Counseling	32%
17,724	Information on their disabilities	30%
13,790	Advocates to make their problems known	28%
22,220	Medical care	15%

## 14,000 Alaskans with disabilities would benefit from special equipment

About 14,000 Alaskans felt that special equipment could help them live, learn, work and play more independently. However, these same persons said they were not aware of all of the available equipment and need information on newer products.

## More than half are not getting the special equipment they need

Of the 14,007 Alaskans with disabilities who need special equipment, 7,608 (58%) do not have access to the equipment that can help them live more self sufficient lives.

## This equipment, called assistive technology, is often far from technical

The equipment available to help persons with disabilities function more independently is called "assistive technology." Some people associate this technology with complex computers or robotics. While these are forms of assistive technology, most Alaskans with disabilities could benefit from very simple tools that help with daily living. Some of the most common types of assistive technology include items that help people hear, such as hearing aids; read, with glasses or magnifiers; communicate, through voice synthesizers; or move, with the aid of walkers or wheelchairs.

## Assistive technology is needed most often for communications

The task in which the greatest number of Alaskans with disabilities need assistance is in face-to-face communication with others. More than 1,900 Alaskans could benefit from assistive technology such as hearing aids and voice synthesizers.

Help with long distance communication was the second greatest need. Almost 1,700 Alaskans could benefit from tools such as TDDs or speaker phones.



## Alterations in the home or office are also important

More than 1,600 Alaskans with disabilities need changes to their home or office, including building modifications or special appliances. Assistive technology designed for these uses includes wheelchair ramps, chair lifts, grab bars, pull down door knobs, tables, desks or cabinets that are raised or lowered, and similar devices.

About 1,100 felt a need for specialized control switches for lights, appliances and other environmental control systems.

## Computers are adaptable tools

Neariy 1,700 Alaskans with disabilities could use some type of adapted computer equipment. Computers are easily adapted with assistive technology such as magnifiers for the video screen, braille keyboards or verbal input/output devices.





## **Accessible transportation is needed**

Modifications to vans, buses and cars such as hand controls and wheelchair lifts can often make it easier for persons with disabilities to get around. An estimated 1,400 Alaskans see a need for this kind of transportation.

## **Alaskans with disabilities would like to enjoy recreation activities**

A new sense of freedom and ability is often experienced by persons with disabilities when they are better able to enjoy their leisure time through the aid of recreational equipment. Almost 1,200 Alaskans desire access to equipment such as cycle chairs and adapted skis.



## **Tools that help with personal care are needed by a few people**

Assistive aids that help with personal care and hygiene include catheters, bathing aids and commode chairs. This is a significant need for close to 1,000 Alaskans.



## Technology can make persons with disabilities better workers

By raising a desk to accommodate a wheelchair, adding screen enlargement software to a computer, or installing pull down door knobs and wheelchair ramps, an employee with disabilities can become a more productive worker. Almost 800 Alaskans believe these assistive aids could help them.

## Some Alaskans need help getting around

Slightly more than 700 Alaskans with disabilities need mobility aids. These may include basic wheelchairs, walkers or a guide dog for a blind person.

<i>Type of Assistive Technology</i>	<i>Persons Not Receiving Needed Tools</i>
Face-to-face communication	1,901
Long distance communication	1,686
Adapted computer	1,686
Building modifications	1,632
Accessible transport	1,383
Recreational devices	1,187
Household aids	1,124
Personal care	984
Work modifications	778
Mobility enhancement	735

## Almost 4,000 Alaskans with disabilities lack the information they need

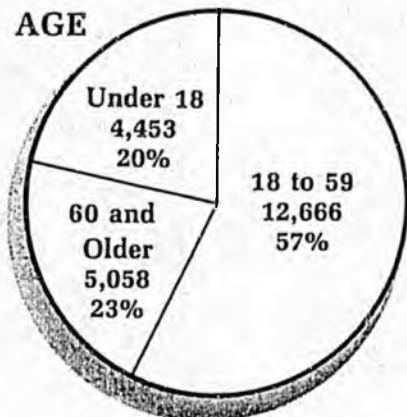
In order to get the assistive aids they need, Alaskans with disabilities need help finding information on what's available and obtaining financial assistance to buy or lease equipment. Almost 4,000 lack current information about new forms of assistive technology that could help them live more independently.

<i>Type of Service</i>	<i>Persons Not Receiving Needed Information</i>
Information on new technology	3,900
Finding companies that sell or service equipment	2,900
Financial aid	2,300

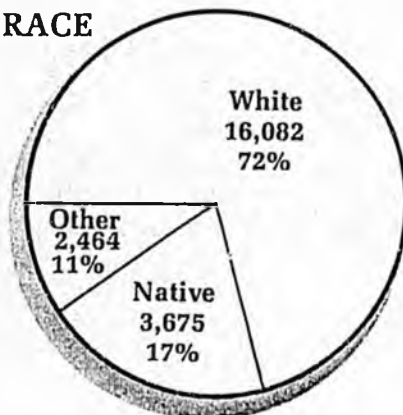
## A profile of Alaskans with disabilities

Most Alaskans with disabilities are white, between 18 and 59 years of age and live in Southcentral Alaska. However, a significant number of Alaskans with disabilities are Native, many are 60 years or older and many reside in rural or Bush Alaska.

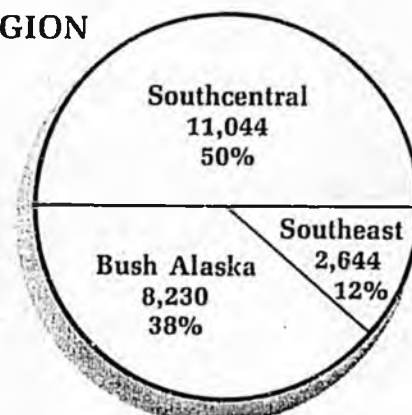
AGE



RACE



REGION



## Younger Alaskans with disabilities see a need for computer-related aids

Alaskans with disabilities under 18 years-old seemed to show the greatest interest in technology adapted to computers. However, this younger group showed less interest in other forms of assistive technology, as did persons who were 60 years or older. This may be because many of their needs are being met by a parent or other member of their household.



## Assistive technology is a big need for persons of working age

Technology in the workplace and at home was requested most often by persons with disabilities in the 18-59 age bracket. This is not surprising, since 18-59 is the average span of working years and a time when people usually live independently.

## **Alaska Natives have a greater need for assistive aids than other races**

Alaska Natives, who represent 17% of Alaskans with disabilities, have a greater need for all forms of assistive technology. Their greatest need was for equipment to improve their ability to move around. Natives represented 41% of all Alaskans with disabilities requesting mobility assistance. The second greatest need expressed by Natives was for assistive technology in the home. Accessible transportation, aids to help with face-to-face communication and personal care assistance were the next greatest needs, in that order.



## **Rural Alaskans with disabilities represent the largest unmet need**

A much larger number of rural Alaskans with disabilities require assistive technology of all kinds, compared to the state's major cities. Southcentral Alaska residents showed less need for assistive aids, possibly indicating a greater availability to residents in this region compared to the rest of the state.

## **The right tools must be found to meet these needs**

The ISER study clearly shows that Alaskans with disabilities have many needs that are not being met for all forms of assistive technology. However, the study did not ask exactly how people expected to use this technology to meet their needs. As a result, it is difficult to determine what specific kinds of devices are required. In the case of computer-related technology, specific uses should be determined before deciding what role this often complex equipment may take.

## **Information services can help determine which tools are best**

Access to information about the most current technology available to help with an individual's unique disability will help Alaskans make wiser decisions regarding which forms of assistive technology can best meet their needs.

## **Major findings from congressional hearings**

The following points were documented during Congressional hearings prior to the adoption of the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1988.

- **Technology is a powerful force in the lives of most U.S. residents.**
- **Technology can provide tools to make performing tasks quicker and easier.**
- **Assistive technology is a necessity that enables individuals with disabilities to engage in many tasks.**
- **There exists already a substantial number of assistive technology devices.**
- **The use of assistive technology devices and services can reduce the cost of disabilities to society.**
- **Many individuals with disabilities do not have access to assistive technology devices and services that would allow them to function commensurate with their abilities.**
- **There are insufficient incentives for commercial pursuit of the application of devices because of limited markets.**
- **There is a lack of coordination at the federal level among agencies that provide or pay for the provision of assistive technology devices and services.**

The above findings were provided by the RESNA Technical Assistance Project, 1101 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20036.

*Photo credits: All but two of the enclosed photos were taken by Gina Murrow, additional photography was done by Frank Flavin.*