

## Rehabilitation Council

### REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT (AT ACT)

#### *Position Paper*

What is the future of assistive technology projects?

States have done an excellent job meeting the mandates given in 1988 and renewed in 1994 and 1998. State assistive technology programs are in an excellent position, with the infrastructure in place, to meet the evolving mandates prescribed by current federal policy initiatives. With a very small federal investment the states can continue to leverage additional funds to address the technology initiatives of local, state, and national policy. The federal government has a role to ensure equal access and equal opportunity for all; no individual should be left behind. To eliminate state assistive technology programs when they are making strident efforts to address the needs of emerging federal policy and, more importantly, individual independence is inconsistent with current federal initiatives. Losing the expertise and benefits of these projects would be very detrimental to national efforts to "increase access to, availability of, and funding for assistive technology through state efforts and national initiatives."

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PENNSYLVANIA REHABILITATION COUNCIL REGARDING THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT

1. Provide consistent funding to maintain the infrastructure of assistive technology services that the network of state Assistant Technology Act programs provides, including information dissemination, demonstrations and training, and technical assistance to all persons with disabilities and providers who serve them.
2. Continue improvement of assistive technology policy and implementation to assure that no citizen with a disability, needing technology, goes without.
3. Assistive technology legislation should include systems change activities on the federal level. Several federal barriers to the provision of assistive technology cannot be addressed at the state level. For example, converging

the definition of assistive technology and durable medical equipment would be most effective on the federal level through the federal Medicare program. Public and private insurance entities often take their lead from Medicare provisions and definitions.

4. Federal legislation should require that all technology that is developed and implemented should be usable by all people.

Since 1992, Pennsylvania has had an assistive technology program under Title I of the Assistive Technology Act. In addition to providing services to thousands of individuals, the Pennsylvania program has created a statewide infrastructure of assistive technology services and has played a role in developing and/or supporting additional state funded assistive technology programs that it does not implement.

**With Title I dollars Pennsylvania's program:**

Responded to 12,385 information requests, hosted more than 10,000 people on its web page, provided assistive technology demonstrations and training events for 40,217 individuals, and gave technical assistance to over 200 individuals last year.

Provided extensive technical assistance to state agencies and service providers to support effective policy implementation. Specific outcomes include Medical Assistance coverage of assistive technology (for augmentative communication devices, durable medical equipment) in Medicaid Waivers, assistive technology lemon laws, and assistive technology coverage in Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Started a low interest guaranteed loan program for the purchase of assistive technology devices. Since 1998, over \$1 million in loans have been made to 136 individuals. The program could not exist without state dollars for loan guarantee funds and could not have expanded without federal funds available under Title III of the AT Act in the last two years.

Maintains a statewide equipment recycling program through which thirty-eight items with a value of \$243,000 were sold in the last year.

*With state funds supported by Title I dollars:*

Developed and implemented Pennsylvania's Assistive Technology Lending Library, which is the result of a collaboration of five state agencies. Last year the Assistive Technology Lending Library provided free loans of 5338 assistive technology devices to 3257 borrowers.

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