



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS  
WITH DISABILITIES**

June 26, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. On behalf of the undersigned co-chairs of the CCD Technology and Telecommunications Task Force, we write in response to the growing needs of people with disabilities nationwide in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The federal legislative response so far has largely ignored many critical needs of the disability community.

People with disabilities are, and will continue to be, at particularly high risk as COVID-19 continues to spread across the country, facing high risk of complications and death if exposed to the outbreak and needing to isolate themselves for protection. We were pleased to see that the CARES Act passed in March included the Ensuring Direct Access to Direct Support Professionals Act (S. 3220/H.R. 5443) so that people with disabilities have access to staffing while in the hospital. However, we are disappointed that a host of critical issues for people with disabilities remain unaddressed. We urge Congress to focus on people with disabilities and their needs in the next COVID-19 bill.

Specifically, as the next pandemic response package moves forward, we urge Congress to ensure that these crucial elements that will help the disability community are included in the legislation:

- 1) Provide \$55 million for the Assistive Technology Act to address the programs' current front-line needs, which are between \$300,000 to \$700,000 per state, in order to accommodate remote working environments; meet the need of consumer demands for devices to combat social isolation, educational needs, and employment needs (possibly due to working remotely); and create innovative solutions to address a rapidly changing environment.
- 2) Significantly increase funding for the Lifeline program, which provides discounted or free phone services and devices for low income households who qualify based on federal or state-specific eligibility criteria, such as Medicaid and Medi-Cal. Lifeline is critical to bridging the digital divide during the crisis, as more than 10% of U.S. households do not presently have a computer (including hand-held devices) and only 19% have a broadband Internet subscription.

While we were pleased to see that the House stimulus package, The HEROES Act, H.R. 6800, included some funding for the Assistive Technology Act, we are concerned that the language earmarks the entire amount of the increased funding to purchase devices for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. Purchasing devices for ASL interpreters is contrary to State Assistive Technology Programs statute requirements.

Thank you again for your efforts on behalf of people with disabilities. We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks as Congress works to finalize the next COVID-19 stimulus bill. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the CCD Technology and Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs: Eric Buehlmann, [eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org](mailto:eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org); Mark Richert, [mark@aerbvi.org](mailto:mark@aerbvi.org); Audrey Busch, [audrey.busch@ataporg.org](mailto:audrey.busch@ataporg.org); and Joe Nahra, [joseph.nahra@powerslaw.com](mailto:joseph.nahra@powerslaw.com).

Sincerely,

Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs  
National Disability Rights Network  
Perkins School for the Blind  
Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired  
American Council Of The Blind  
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
American Foundation for the Blind  
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation  
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocate  
American Physical Therapy Association  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
United Spinal Association  
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation  
The Arc