



ACCESS TECHNOLOGY AFFORDABILITY ACT (H.R. 431/S. 212)

Issue--The cost of critically needed access technology is out of reach for most blind Americans.

The high cost of access technology creates a difficult economic reality. Most access technology ranges from \$1,000 to \$6,000. For example, a leading screen reader is \$900, a popular Braille note taker is \$5,495, one model of a refreshable Braille display is \$2,795, and a moderately priced Braille embosser is \$3,695. According to the United States Census Bureau 69.5 percent of blind Americans are either unemployed or underemployed.¹ Consequently, most blind Americans do not have sufficient financial resources needed to purchase these items.² These financial barriers can ultimately lead to a loss of employment, insufficient education, or even isolation from community activities.

Medical insurance will not cover the cost of access technology. Current definitions of "medical care," "medical necessity," and "durable medical equipment" within common insurance policies do not include access technology. These definitions were adopted in the 1960s "when medical care was viewed primarily as curative and palliative, with little or no consideration given to increasing an individual's functional status."³ Many states' Medicaid programs and individual health insurance plans have adopted similar definitions and likewise will not cover the cost of access technology.⁴

Access technology enables blind Americans to participate in today's workforce. Blindness is well-defined and measurable,⁵ but affects each person differently and at different ages. Since individuals' needs differ, manufacturers have designed various tools that enable each blind American to perform tasks that they were once unable to accomplish themselves due to their blindness. Braille note takers are frequently used in schools, screen reading software allows workers to check their email at home, and screen magnification software can help seniors losing vision learn about community activities. Access technology equips blind Americans to seek employment and stay employed. For the 69.5 percent of blind Americans who are either unemployed or underemployed, it is a vehicle that facilitates the job seeking process. Despite this critical need however, public and private entities struggle to meet consumer demand.⁶ This leads to untimely delays in the delivery of necessary technology and ultimately harms the blind consumer.

Solution--Access Technology Affordability Act:

Makes access technology more affordable so that blind Americans can procure these items for themselves. It establishes a refundable tax credit for blind Americans in the amount of \$2,000 to be used over a three-year period to offset the cost of access technology. The credit created by ATAA will sunset after five years and will be indexed for inflation.

Provides flexibility for individuals to obtain access technology based upon their specific needs. Accessibility requires an individualized assessment of one's own skills and needs. Therefore, blind Americans should be given the opportunity to procure access technology on their own to ensure that they are receiving the tools that are most useful for them.

Will increase federal income tax revenue. More blind Americans working means more people paying taxes. It also means that those blind Americans who obtain gainful employment through this tax credit will no longer need to draw from federal programs such as Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance and will instead be paying into the Social Security Program.

GOAL-IMPROVE AFFORDABILITY OF CRITICALLY NEEDED ACCESS TECHNOLOGY NECESSARY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDEPENDENT LIVING.

Cosponsor the Access Technology Affordability Act.

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¹ See 2017 American Community Survey, www.disabilitystatistics.org.

² Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2016). "Disability Statistics from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS)." Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI). Retrieved November 11, 2016, from www.disabilitystatistics.org.

³ National Council on Disability, "Federal Policy Barriers to Assistive Technology," (May 31, 2000) 8, http://www.ncd.gov/rawmedia_repository/c9e48e89_261b_4dda_bc74_203d5915519f.pdf.

⁴ Assistive Technology Industry Associates, "AT Resources Funding Guide," <https://www.atia.org/at-resources/what-is-at/resources-funding-guide/> (last accessed December 10, 2018).

⁵ See 26 U.S.C § 63(f)(4).

⁶ See e.g. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services and Disability Research, "Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request," <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget20/justifications/i-rehab.pdf>, p. I-50.