



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Chairman Bob Casey

21st Century Assistive Technology Act

Introduced by Senators Bob Casey (D-PA), Susan Collins (R-ME), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Kevin Cramer (R-ND)

Why do we need the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act?

Individuals with disabilities and older adults face lower employment rates, higher poverty rates and poorer health outcomes than non-disabled and younger individuals. In many cases, access to assistive technology can help address these issues and help those with disabilities benefit from education, and have a healthier and more independent life in the communities of their choice. Assistive technology can make it possible for an individual with a disability to stay employed and for an older person to remain in their own home. Unfortunately, much of the general public remain unaware of the availability and range of technology that can benefit the lives of their loved ones.

“Assistive technology” refers to any piece of equipment, product or service that helps someone with a disability or functional limitation successfully accomplish their daily needs. From wheelchair ramps, hearing aids and grab bars, to screen readers, smart phones and even artificial intelligence, assistive technology can help individuals maintain employment, enter or stay in school and allow individuals to remain engaged and connected members of their communities. Despite the impact assistive technology can have, there are millions of individuals who could still benefit for increased access to the devices and services.

The Assistive Technology Act was originally passed in 1988 and today provides funding for states to expand access to assistive technology through services such as device demonstrations, loans of assistive technology and recycling programs to provide lightly used devices to individuals. The Assistive Technology Act has not been updated since 2004. With the growing population of people with disabilities and older adults, more supports and resources are needed to reach those who can benefit from assistive technology.

What will the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act do?

The 21st Century Assistive Technology Act will update the Assistive Technology Act of 2004 so access to assistive technology keeps pace with advances in technology. The legislation will increase minimum state grant funding from \$410,000 to \$550,000 and from outlying areas funding from \$125,000 to \$167,500 in order to better serve rural regions and the increasing needs among older individuals. The bill clarifies that the program serves all people with disabilities, including older adults who have developed disabilities and expands groups to be included in state assistive technology advisory councils to include directors of state Medicaid/Medicare programs and veterans groups. The program also increases funding to the Protection and Advocacy programs to monitor access to assistive technology for all individuals.

For more information or to cosponsor, please contact Josh_Dubensky@aging.senate.gov.