



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change

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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 214: Human Services - Maryland Assistive Technology Program - Establishment February 11, 2025 Position: Support

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is dedicated to advancing the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM is pleased to submit this testimony in support of House Bill 214, which aims to establish the Maryland Assistive Technology Program (MDATP) within the Maryland Department of Disabilities.

This bill seeks to codify the MDATP into state law, enabling it to expand its services to include fee-based offerings such as assessments, customized training, and digital accessibility evaluations. These enhanced services will help to address critical gaps in the state's assistive technology (AT) resources while fostering the MDATP's long-term sustainability. By advancing HB 214, Maryland reaffirms its commitment to increasing access to AT devices and services, empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve greater independence.

AT empowers people with disabilities to enhance their ability to manage daily living, work, education, communication, and recreation. Through the MDATP's statewide AT lending libraries, Marylanders can borrow equipment such as alternative and augmentative communication devices, reading machines, assistive listening devices, environmental controls, and adaptive products. This flexibility minimizes financial risks and supports informed decision-making by allowing individuals to try equipment before committing to a purchase. Once they identify what works best, they can pursue funding through insurance, choose to purchase the item independently, or even obtain the item through a re-use center for free.

Securing AT through insurance can be an arduous process, often requiring individuals to navigate complex approval systems and pursue multiple appeals to obtain even basic equipment. The MDATP serves as a vital resource for those unable to access the AT they need through insurance, whether due to coverage denials or the need for specialized devices that fall outside the scope of medical coverage. Additionally, the MDATP provides critical support for uninsured individuals who would otherwise have no

access to these essential tools. By increasing funding and solidifying the MDATP as a permanent program, this legislation ensures individuals with disabilities will have access to AT devices and services.

At DRM one of our primary goals is to improve access to AT for Marylanders with disabilities. Each year, we support numerous clients in obtaining AT. Unfortunately, there remains a significant lack of affordable AT options for low- and middle-income individuals with disabilities in Maryland. To bridge this gap, DRM frequently refers clients to the MDATP for essential services such as access to the re-use program, AT counseling, and borrowing equipment to find the right fit. It is crucial to nurture and expand programs like the MDATP to ensure that Marylanders with disabilities are not left behind in accessing these critical resources.

Notably, this bill establishes the Assistive Technology Services Fund to finance essential services such as training, digital accessibility evaluations, and remediation. As vital aspects of daily life—such as government programs, employment, and education—continue to shift online, it is imperative that Marylanders with disabilities are included in these digital spaces. By supporting this fund, Maryland reaffirms its commitment to creating a more accessible digital environment.

DRM is also proud to support this bill as the MDATP is designed to prioritize underrepresented populations, ensuring that all Marylanders—regardless of background or resources—have access to assistive technology. By investing in AT, Maryland will empower individuals with disabilities to live more independently and engage fully in their communities.

DRM strongly supports House Bill 214 and requests a favorable report. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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