

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary
Christian J. Miele, Deputy Secretary

Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor



December 30, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan
State House 100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
H-101 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Report required by Human Services Article §7-616 (MSAR # 6074)

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The Maryland Department of Disabilities is pleased to submit the enclosed annual report on the Assitive Technology Loan Program for calendar year 2020 as required under Human Services Article §7-616 (MSAR #6074). We are proud of the positive impact this program has had on the quality of life of those supported with loan guarantees in the twenty-one years since the program was first implemented.

Thank you for your steadfast commitment to this essential program and to other services that benefit Maryland residents with disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol A. Beatty".

Carol A. Beatty
Secretary

cc: Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services (5 copies)



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES

Assistive Technology Program

**ANNUAL REPORT TO
GOVERNOR LARRY HOGAN
AND
THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
on the
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY
LOAN PROGRAM
January 1, 2021**

Introduction

The Assistive Technology Loan Program (ATLP) is a program of the Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MDTAP), a unit within the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD). The ATLP was created on October 1, 1999. It is codified at Human Services Article §§7-601 through 7-616. This program is guided by an eleven-member board of directors, including eight who are appointed by the Governor and three state agency representatives. The ATLP pays for program administrative costs through interest earnings from the distinct loan fund kept in a separate account managed by the State Treasurer with fund accounting provided by the Office of the Comptroller.

The program's purpose is to provide financial assistance for the purchase of assistive technology equipment, designed to help individuals with disabilities achieve independence and improve their quality of life. This program provides low interest, affordable loans to qualifying borrowers with disabilities who have encountered obstacles qualifying for financing in the traditional market. Without the ATLP, borrowers would have to either purchase the assistive technology they need using high interest credit cards, borrow against their homes, or not purchase them at all. The program partners with two area lenders to issue loans while the program provides loan guarantees and interest subsidies, where appropriate, to make loans more accessible and affordable for people with disabilities and their families. In some cases, loans are approved without a guarantee. Borrowers without "non-guaranteed" loans are still able to take advantage of the accessibility and affordability of the loans because of the program's relationship with its participating lenders. Program staff provide significant application support and credit counseling to potential borrowers.

2019 Loan Activity & Program Expenditures

For the annual period of November 30, 2019 through November 30, 2020, the ATLP:

- Received 71 loan applications totaling \$1,382,133 in funding requests
- Approved 41 loan requests, totaling \$1,030,905
- Closed 19 guaranteed loans via our lending partners for \$630,987
- Closed 3 non-guaranteed loans (no cost to the program) for \$47,763

During this same period, 36 loan approvals totaling \$687,454 were issued but then withdrawn by the applicants. Loan withdraws happen for a variety of reasons including individual circumstances, receiving equipment from another source, or determining the item is no longer a priority. The report reflects withdrawn loans because they have gone through the normal ATLP staff and Board of Directors review, approval and processing steps.

Additional program highlights include:

- Of particular note representing the needs of the majority of our constituents, the ATLP closed 10 vehicle modifications and transportation loans totaling more than \$385,831.53 between November 30, 2019 and November 30, 2020;
- All of the ATLP applicants in 2020 indicated a satisfaction measure of highly satisfied/satisfied with their experience.

- From inception through November 30, 2020, the ATLP has received 2,780 loan applications and issued 1,182 loans totaling \$20,106,733.
- Since inception, the total amount of repayments made by borrowers for guaranteed ATLP loans is \$11.6M.
- The overall default rate for guaranteed loans through the ATLP since inception of the program is .03% with 133 loans having entered a default status. ATLP makes every effort to reduce the overall loss to the fund through vehicle repossessions, payment plans, and financial recoveries through the State of Maryland Central Collections Unit (CCU). As of November 30, 2020, the ATLP has recovered \$175,312.41 of a possible \$516,771.60 from defaulted accounts.

Direct Impacts for Program Borrowers

Borrowers have used loans to substantially improve their lives. The Program helps Marylanders purchase technology that supports or increases access to employment, education, and the community. Borrower purchases can include technology to help them remain independent in the community, complete higher education, support work-related tasks and activities, or transition from institutional settings into the community.

Transportation

The ATLP recently provided a loan to a participant to purchase a non-modified vehicle for running errands and doctor appointments. This person has complete hearing loss in one ear and partial hearing loss in the other. This non-modified vehicle has made it possible to eliminate dependence on public transportation, family, and friends for commuting. The applicant has shared with ATLP staff how delighted they are finally being independent.

Another family needed to replace their non-adapted vehicle with a modified vehicle to transport their growing child with spastic quadriplegia, a severe form of cerebral palsy. They were approved on their own merit by a lender; however, the loan was ultimately declined because the high cost of the equipment exceeded the value of the vehicle. With the help of the ATLP, they were subsequently able to secure a guaranteed loan for the full cost of the vehicle and adaptations giving their family a safe way to transport their child.

Assistive Technology

One applicant, a member of the University of Maryland Orthopedics and Rehabilitation Rugby team, applied to the ATLP for a low interest loan to cover the balance of an adapted rugby wheelchair. The participant had already received a grant from the Challenged Athletes Foundation and was seeking a loan for the difference. Working with ATLP staff, a non-guaranteed loan was approved at a preferred interest rate and this individual is now able to use the rugby wheelchair to continue participating in team sports.

Another recent applicant was approved for a non-guaranteed loan to purchase AT to support mobility both in and out of the home. This individual has complications from a type of staph infection, which limits their mobility. With this loan, the ATLP participant was able to purchase a scooter, a lift recliner and vehicle lift to maintain his independence.

Employment and Higher Education

High tech modifications are frequently requested items for financing through the Maryland Assistive Technology Loan Program. The program closed a loan application request for \$15,235 to finance the cost of an automatic rear ramp and EZ-Lock for the participant's current vehicle. The applicant works for the federal government and needed vehicle adaptations to ensure reliable access to work while dealing with muscular dystrophy, congestive heart failure, and compromised breathing function. These vehicle adaptations provided the equipment needed to continue working, independently traveling with his family, and participating in his community.

Program Improvements in 2020

- Launched a new cloud-based database that provides a secure customizable user-friendly software application platform to complete client communications management, storing sensitive financial information, and solutions for reporting and analytics.
- Established a Strategic Planning sub-committee of the ATLP Board of Directors to identify funding initiatives and possible future partnerships with direct guidance from the ATLP Board.
- Hired and trained two new ATLP staff remotely during COVID-19 pandemic, providing essential training for serving constituents and maintaining existing accounts.
- Reached an agreement with our partner lender to waive interest on outstanding car notes for vehicles that remain longer than 30-45 days in the auction yard, due to Covid-19 restrictions on selling vehicles.
- Collaborated with CASH Campaign of Maryland to implement a service for ATLP applicants, providing access to certified financial planners for financial education, coaching, and other programs to build their financial knowledge.
- Amended the ATLP Policies and Procedures to identify key areas to support the ongoing initiatives of the program while preserving the fund balance.
- Provided staff and ATLP Board training in fair lending practices.
- Established a customary discount of \$500-\$1,000 discount on internet sales for adapted vehicles with a mobility dealership we frequently deal with.
- Participated on a panel for national Alternative Financing Programs addressing Loan Program Marketing and Outreach.

Program Goals for 2021

- Develop applicant resources to expand funding options.
- Collaborate with adapted vehicle vendors to extend funding options and institute customary discounts.
- Submit grants for new and innovative ATLP initiatives supporting expansions for Smart Home Technology, high tech modifications, and adapted vehicle access.
- Expand outreach in underserved counties through webinars and community presentations.
- Develop partnership with Veteran's Affairs to support veterans and their assistive technology needs.
- Identify additional reporting measures for ATLP to measure program outcomes.

Conclusion

Maryland's Assistive Technology Loan Program remains a smart, compassionate investment in Marylanders with disabilities seeking to achieve maximum participation in the community in the most integrated setting possible. Access to assistive technology is critical to people with disabilities, older adults and their families who are seeking to maintain and improve aspects of daily life. By offering an alternative to traditional financing options, ATLP helps turn the dream of living independently into a reality.