

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

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



# Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES

Assistive Technology Program

January 5, 2022

The Honorable Larry Hogan  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Bill Ferguson  
President  
Senate of Maryland  
State House, H-107  
Annapolis Maryland 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones  
Speaker  
Maryland House of Delegates  
State House, H-101  
Annapolis Maryland 21401

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

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Pursuant to Human Services Article §7-616, the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) is pleased to submit the enclosed annual report on the Assistive Technology Loan Program for 2021 detailing the number, amount, and use of loans and subsidies for which MDOD has provided guarantees of loans and subsidies of loan interest. MDOD is proud of the positive impact this program has had on the quality of life of those supported with loan guarantees in the twenty-two years since the program was first implemented.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol A. Beatty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carol A. Beatty  
Secretary

cc: Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services (5 copie

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**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, 2022**

## **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, establishing agreements to provide discounted interest rates for non-guaranteed borrowers who were referred by the ATLP. In addition, program staff provide significant application support and credit counseling to potential borrowers.

## **2020-2021 Loan Activity & Program Expenditures**

For the annual period of November 30, 2020 through November 30, 2021, the ATLP:

- Received 67 loan applications totaling \$1,581,610 in funding requests
- Approved 45 loan requests, totaling \$1,020,699
- Closed 27 guaranteed loans via our lending partners for \$599,835.90
- Closed 4 non-guaranteed loans (no cost to the program) for \$53,990

During this same period, 15 loan approvals totaling \$229,930 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:

- Closed 12 vehicle modifications and transportation loans totaling \$317,332.25 between November 30, 2020 and November 30, 2021;
- All of the ATLP applicants in 2021 indicated a satisfaction measure of highly satisfied/satisfied with their experience.

- From inception through November 30, 2021, the ATLP has received 2,847 loan applications and issued 1,213 loans totaling \$20,760,560.
- Since inception, the total amount of repayments made by borrowers for guaranteed ATLP loans is \$12.7M.
- The overall default rate for guaranteed loans through the ATLP since inception of the program is 4% with 136 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, 2021, the ATLP has recovered \$183,492.70 of a possible \$517,464.10 from defaulted accounts.

### **Direct Impacts for Program Borrowers**

Borrowers have used loans to substantially improve their lives. The Program helps Marylander's 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**

In this past year, the ATLP guaranteed a loan to a family to purchase a modified vehicle to transport their growing, non-ambulatory child with cerebral palsy. The family was initially approved on their own merit by the lender; however, when the family was ready to close the loan, the high cost of the adapted equipment exceeded the value of the vehicle, making it impossible for the lender to issue the loan with the initial approval. Thus, the family referred back to the ATLP for potential funding of the adapted vehicle. During the loan process, and after the initial loan program board review, the co-borrower's income changed due to COVID-19 hardship, increasing the debt-to-income ratio. In spite of that, the ATLP was able to structure the loan so that the family was able to secure a guarantee for the full cost of the vehicle and adaptations, giving them a safe way to transport their child.

Another AT user with cerebral palsy and spastic quadriplegia was in need of a vehicle that was accessible for wheelchairs. Prior to her family obtaining funding from the Assistive Technology Loan Program for the accessible vehicle, the applicant was transported in a standard vehicle or, in some instances, incurred the added expense of renting an accessible vehicle for transportation to medical appointments, shopping, and visiting family. Having access to an adapted vehicle has allowed the applicant to be transported comfortably, safely, and dependably with her family and allowed her the ability to attend job training classes, with the intent of leveraging employment options in the future.

#### **Assistive Technology**

The ATLP serves people with a variety of AT needs including hearing aids. Recently, we received a request from an individual with profound hearing loss who depends on hearing aids for all facets of communication. This request was presented to the Board as an exception to ATLP policies and procedures because the amount was over \$5,000, the standard limit on unsecured loans. The Board approved the loan for the full amount. The applicant reported that their improved hearing and communication has increased their quality of life and given them greater confidence at the workplace.

An inaccessible home can present many challenges to people with disabilities, often fostering a dependence on in-home supports to meet basic needs. Recently, the ATLP assisted an applicant needing to make modifications to his bathroom. The applicant is an amputee with paralysis from a stroke, making a standard bathroom entirely unusable and limiting the applicant's independence in the home. The applicant only had a portion of the amount for the construction and was in need of financing the balance. With the help of an ATLP loan, the applicant was able to build the bathroom to ADA standards (expand the doorway, install a walk-in shower accessible for wheelchairs, install a pedestal sink for wheelchair clearance, etc.) making it accessible, functional and safe.

## **Employment and Higher Education**

One particular AT user has utilized the Assistive Technology Loan Program on numerous occasions for ongoing assistive technology needs. Because of the low interest rates and flexible repayment terms, the applicant was once again happy to return to the ATLP to fund the cost of a non-adapted vehicle. The AT user experiences arthrogryposis which affects their entire body. The most recent application request was for a vehicle with hand controls. This loan has enabled the applicant to maintain her independence, using the car to get to work as a cyber-analyst, running errands, going to church, and living a full & independent life.

Assistance from the ATLP can provide participants with the critical support they need to obtain an education, especially during the uncertainty of a pandemic and the shift to a virtual platform for schooling. For example, one applicant with Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy utilized the AT loan program this past year to finance the cost of a personal computer in order to continue working on their college degree virtually. By having a computer at home, the applicant was able to continue classes without missing any semesters.

## **Program Improvements in 2021**

- Identified another potential lending partner to service the assistive technology loans.
- Explored ways to build partnerships with other State Government Agencies, Foundations, Nonprofits and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI).
- Explored potential partnership with Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation and CDFI Appalachian Loan Fund.
- Identified other state agencies working in direct lending and have conducted conversations around partnering on key activities, including direct lending and credit reporting.
- Hired and trained one new ATLP staff person to serve constituents and support existing accounts.
- Continued efforts to amend the ATLP Policies and Procedures and lender partnership agreements to identify key areas to support the ongoing initiatives of the program while preserving the fund balance.
- Collaborated with a new adapted vehicle dealership to establish a customary discount of a \$500 discount on internet sales for adapted vehicles.
- Participated on calls with other nationwide alternative finance programs to explore initiatives they're working on.
- Submitted a Letter of Intent to France-Merrick Foundation with initiative iDrive Pilot Program supporting expansions for adapted vehicle access.

- Worked with grant writer to identify key fund development activities and facilitate conversations with nonprofits as the ATLP explores more public/private partnerships for expansion.

### **Program Goals for 2022**

- Apply for 2022 Administration for Community Living solicitation grant for nationwide Alternative Financing Programs.
- Improving database customization for continued development for robust reporting measures.
- Continue to explore ways to build partnerships with other State Government Agencies, Foundations, Non-profits and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI). □ Explore funding opportunities and new initiatives for loan program fund growth.
- Establish an agreement for a Communications Intern Specialist and Strategic Planner Intern to work with the Strategic Planning sub-committee of the ATLP Board of Directors
- Submit grants for new and innovative ATLP initiatives supporting expansions for Smart Home Technology, high tech modifications, and adapted vehicle access.
- Continue marketing outreach through webinars and community presentations.
- 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 settings 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, the ATLP helps turn the dream of living independently into a reality.