

The AT Messenger...bringing technology to you

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative (DATI), Volume 11, No. 4,
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School Districts Waiting on Congress's New IDEA

Beth Mineo Mollica, DATI Director

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization was well underway before the August Congressional recess. The House completed action on its controversial bill, HR 1350, with remarkable speed in April. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) unanimously endorsed its bipartisan bill on June 25, and that bill is awaiting full consideration in the Senate. As this issue of The AT Messenger goes to print, speculation abounds about the timetable for Senate action on IDEA, with some expressing concern that the work may not be completed until sometime next year.

Controversy is expected, as numerous amendments relating to funding, discipline provisions, personnel standards, attention to transition, and vouchers are anticipated. With regard to assistive technology, both the House and the Senate bills affirm the important role technology can play in educational access, participation, and achievement. Both bills retain assistive technology needs as one of the "special factors" that must be considered for all children for whom an IEP is developed. Both bills acknowledge that technology issues should be included in both pre-service and in-service personnel preparation activities. Both continue support for research activities that will result in new technologies.

There are innovative provisions in both the House and Senate bills, however, that could revolutionize access to print materials for those who have difficulty with this medium for any number of reasons. Both bills require the adoption of a national Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, which requires textbooks and other print materials to be provided in a standard digital format that facilitates translation into large print, Braille, speech, and other accessible formats. Within two years of the passage of the Act, educational publishers will be required to prepare and supply electronic files

containing the contents of the instructional materials using the file format that will be finalized this fall.

This new development would eliminate the burdens now faced by school districts when they translate a textbook into an accessible format. At the current time, districts must scan each page of text, which converts it into digital form, and then transform that digital media into the particular formats needed by students. The proposed IDEA provision would shift the burden for provision of digital media onto publishers, saving districts considerable time and money. Most importantly, more straightforward access to digital media will help to get materials to students much more efficiently than is currently possible.

Dana by AlphaSmart Befriends Students

Eden Melmed, AT Specialist, New Castle County ATRC

Many of you are already familiar with the AlphaSmart 3000. It is a simple, portable, low cost solution for many with handwriting and/or language-based difficulties. The AlphaSmart 3000 allows the user to enter and edit text, then send that text to any available computer for formatting or directly to a printer. For those who need something a little more powerful, AlphaSmart, Inc. recently introduced its latest product, Dana. Dana is being promoted as "the Palm powered laptop alternative that's truly affordable." Dana combines the power, convenience and affordability of a handheld device with the simplicity and ease of use of the AlphaSmart 3000--a great benefit for those who struggle with writing tasks.

Like the AlphaSmart 3000, Dana weighs in at just 2 pounds and is designed to take the abuse of daily use, making it easy and safe to transport to and from school. The new and exciting feature of Dana is its use of the Palm operating system (OS) v4.1 while maintaining the full-size, integrated keyboard and a screen that is 3.5 times wider than typical handheld devices. This new larger, backlit LCD screen is much easier to see than the AlphaSmart 3000 display. Like other handheld devices, Dana has onscreen entry that gives the user the option of writing with the stylus directly onto the screen. Dana ships with the basic Palm tools:

- Address book

- Date book
- To do list
- Calculator



Dana is also compatible with most of the existing Palm applications (estimated to number more than 10,000). It also comes with AlphaWord, a full-featured word processing software compatible with Microsoft Word.

The Dana by AlphaSmart is a powerful new tool for writing, taking notes and organization. At \$379, it is a low cost alternative to a laptop. For more information about AlphaSmart, Inc. products, please visit their website at www.alphasmart.com or contact your local ATRC.

Collaborative Teaming to be Highlighted at Inclusion Conference

Dr. Marti Snell, Coordinator of the Special Education Program at the University of Virginia, will present her views on Collaborative Teaming at the Tenth Annual Inclusion Conference on November 6, 2003 at Ruddertowne in Rehoboth Beach.

The conference will begin at 8 a.m. with a continental breakfast. Following breakfast, Dr. Snell, whose research and writing focus on inclusion and severe disabilities, will give the keynote address on collaborative teaming. Other topics covered during the day will include collaborative teaching, accessing the general curriculum, classroom management and inclusive strategies. The conference will conclude at 3:15 p.m.

The registration fee for the Inclusion Conference is \$20 per person and includes continental breakfast and lunch. Full-time students will receive a 50% discount and special education teachers registering in conjunction with a general education teacher will pay one registration fee.

For more information, contact Marsha Mills at the Development Disabilities Council at 739-7193, mmills@state.de.us.

DSS/Medicaid Responds to The AT Messenger

The following letter was received in response to an article in the Spring 2003 issue of The AT Messenger regarding funding for hearing aids in Delaware. It is printed here in its entirety.

April 25, 2003

Dear Dr. Mineo Mollica:

Recently, the Assistive Technology Messenger carried a very informative article on "Funding for Hearing Aids." We would like to clarify reference to Medicaid coverage of hearing aids for adults.

While the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment Benefit within Medicaid assures coverage of all federally allowable, medically necessary services for individuals under the age of 21, including the provision of hearing aids, there is no equivalent policy or coverage for adults in the Medicaid program who are at or above that age level.

In fact, according to State Medicaid Policy, there is no coverage for hearing aids for adults, even when medically necessary. And, there is no individual consideration policy that would exempt an adult client from this exclusion. Under General Policy Section 1.15.1 of the Provider Policy Manual, "Hearing aids for individuals twenty-one years of age and over" are identified as non-covered services.

Further, neither the Diamond State Partners managed care program nor the First State Health Plan Managed Care Organization cover hearing aids for adults. These service delivery systems follow State Medicaid policy and adhere to its benefit exclusions.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify Medicaid policy on this issue.

Sincerely,

David Michalik

Senior Administrator

Division of Social Service

Sixth Annual LIFE Conference Announced

The 6th Annual LIFE Conference will be held on January 22, 2004 at the Dover Sheraton Hotel. Bobby Silverstein, Director of the Center for the Study of Advancement of Disability Policy, is the keynote speaker and will address legislation and advocacy efforts at the national level.

The LIFE Conference will begin at 8 a.m. with a continental breakfast followed by Mr. Silverstein's address, and will conclude at 3:45 p.m. Registration materials will be available in November. The conference fee is \$35 and will include continental breakfast and lunch.

This year's attendees will be able to register for three of the twelve workshops offered. Session topics for the conference include:

- How to Influence People at the Federal Level (Congress and Agencies)
- Ramps for Access: Design Options and Funding
- When I'm 64: Aging and Disabilities
- Universal Design for Accessing the General Curriculum
- Acquired Brain Injury
- Consultation Model for Early Intervention: What it Means for Families, Service Providers and Service Coordinators
- What's Up with Psychopharmacology

- Reading Initiative: Preventive Measures of Reading in Early Childhood
- Resolving Health Care Insurance Disputes
- Access to Print
- Recreation and Leisure
- IDEA Re-authorization

For more information, please contact Marsha Mills at the Developmental Disabilities Council at (302) 739-7193 or mmills@state.de.us.

Independence Through Assistive Technology Act of 2003

Martin Blair, Director, Utah Assistive Technology Program

The Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (AT Act) is scheduled to expire at the end of 2004. As this date approaches, a number of groups--including the Technology and Telecommunications Task Force of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities in Washington, DC -- have convened to talk about what a new federal assistive technology initiative should look like and how it should be implemented, and to devise various strategies for implementing assistive technology initiatives at the national level. The task force gathered input and collected suggestions from leaders in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The result is the proposed "Independence Through Assistive Technology Act of 2003."

The proposed legislation has two main sections. The first provides core state grants, technical assistance, and funding to address emerging technology-related initiatives. The second section provides for protection and advocacy services. The goals of the governor-designated core state grants are to ensure that people with disabilities have timely access to appropriate technology and that they have the skills they need to utilize technology to maximize their independence. State grantees must use the funds to provide device demonstrations, device loan programs, device reutilization programs, training, technical assistance, information systems, and interagency coordination. Additionally, states will be asked to identify at least two

emerging issues, such as the New Freedom Initiative on Community Living or Help America Vote Act, and utilize grant funds to support activities that address current needs in identified areas. Funding may also be used to expand alternative financing programs, advocacy services and other activities approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

The proposed legislation outlines how each state will be guided by an advisory group that will be made up of no fewer than 51 percent of individuals with disabilities or their parents, guardians, or immediate family members. Data collection and reporting requirements are outlined for an annual report to Congress. Minimum grant amounts of \$150,000 for outlying areas and \$500,000 for states are established. Funding in excess of minimum grant amounts is to be distributed based on population. There is a 10 percent limit on administrative costs and an 8 percent match requirement for states. This proposed legislation also includes technical assistance for the core state grant programs.

Competitive supplementary grants may be awarded if funding is available. These one-year grants could be used to establish or expand alternative financing (cash loan) programs, expand equipment loan programs, expand device recycling programs, and develop other activities announced as a priority by the Secretary of Education. A match will be required for grants over \$50,000 in the form of \$1 nonfederal funds for every \$2 in federal funding.

Funds are sought to provide protection and advocacy systems in each state. These will be designed to assist individuals with the acquisition, utilization, or maintenance of assistive technology devices and services. The proposed legislation requests approximately \$60 million to fund this act. This is the amount appropriated to the AT Act in its largest funding year (2002).

The disability advocacy community is hopeful that Congress and the administration will not only continue, but also enhance, its role in assisting individuals with disabilities in gaining access to the technologies they need to be more independent in the environments of their choice. Certainly, the existing structure of Assistive Technology Act programs including core state grants, Protection and Advocacy, Alternative Financing, and national technical assistance programs needs to be improved. The proposed bill is an attempt to

put the best suggestions into practice. Advocates believe that building on the expertise and experience of state Assistive Technology Act programs, and the protection and advocacy programs that accompany them, is a sound federal investment. Working with them to refine their role and to focus on specific emerging initiatives should be of paramount importance to all of us concerned with enabling individuals with disabilities to be independent, participating members of our society.

Reprinted with permission from the August, 2003 issue of AccessWorld (copyright 2003 American Foundation for the Blind). For more information about AccessWorld, visit www.afb.org/accessworld.asp.

New AT Equipment Added to the DATI's ATRCs Inventory

Since DATI's Assistive Technology Resource Centers (ATRCs) opened in 1992, they have made thousands of no-cost AT loans to people in Delaware.

Thanks to funds from the Delaware Department of Education, new equipment has just been added to ATRCs' inventory. New AT devices include:

- In-line Amplifier, Ameriphone
- Left-hand Maltron Keyboard, Applied Learning
- UltraKey, Bytes of Learning
- 7 Level Communication Builder, Enabling Devices
- Cheap Talk 4 Inline, Enabling Devices
- Sam-Trackball for PC, Enabling Devices
- Twitch Switch with 1/8" Plug, Enabling Devices
- FlipperPort, Enhanced Vision Systems
- Homework Wiz, Franklin Electronic Publishers
- Speaking Language Master, Franklin Electronic Publishers
- Speaking Homework Wiz, Franklin Electronic Publishers

- Sonic Boom Alarm Clock with Bed Vibrator, Harris Communications
- Exploring Kidspiration, Inspiration
- Expert Mouse, Kensington
- Renaissance Optical Mouse, Keyboard Alternative & Vision Solutions
- Math Blaster Ages 5-7, Knowledge Adventure
- Math Blaster Ages 6-8, Knowledge Adventure
- Math Blaster Ages 7-9, Knowledge Adventure
- Math Blaster Ages 9-12, Knowledge Adventure
- Math Blaster Pre-Algebra, Knowledge Adventure
- AudioLink Set 100, LS&S
- Voice Mate Organizer, Maxi Aids
- LoTTIE Kit 2003, Onion Mountain Technologies
- LoTTIE Kit for Literacy, Onion Mountain Technologies
- BigKeys LX, Options by Infogrip
- Keyboard with Keyguard, Options by Infogrip
- Keyguard, Options by Infogrip
- OnScreen with CrossScanner (Win), Options by Infogrip
- REACH Interface Author (Win), Options by Infogrip
- REACH Interface Author with Smart Keys (Win), Options by Infogrip
- WordQ, QuillSoft
- Spyrolaces, Sammons Preston Rolyan
- Math Shop Deluxe, Scholastic
- Five Finger Typist, Tash, Inc.
- MicroPoint, Zygo Industries, Inc.

Assistive Technology: Buyer Beware

How to avoid mistakes when purchasing educational assistive technology

Dan Fendler, AT Specialist, Sussex County ATRC

Several weeks ago, a mom stopped by the ATRC looking for something that would help her 9-year-old son with school. He has a central auditory processing disorder (CAPD). Typically, children with CAPD can hear, but may have difficulty understanding and interpreting what is said.

The school he is attending is aware of his special needs, and in good faith, purchased a sound field system for the classroom. Sound field systems do help some children with CAPD. Unfortunately, the system did not help this particular child. The mom borrowed our FM System (a personal amplification device) and indicated that she thought it was working well.

There are dozens of other examples of unsuccessful attempts to use assistive technology in the classroom. Most schools have a "closet" that contains discarded AT, or tools that are not longer used. One need only look as far as that closet to see examples of AT that did not work.

Whatever the area, whether it is overcoming a learning disability or using an augmentative communication system, finding a device or software program that actually works and helps solve a problem can be a daunting task. There are a few steps you can take to help ensure an assistive technology success story.

Know your resources

Many school districts have an individual who is designated as the District AT Specialist. It has been my experience that many of the AT Specialists are overworked - they often carry this additional responsibility along with full time teaching duties. But, it is a good place to start.

The physical therapist, speech language pathologist, or occupational therapist might also have information and knowledge that could be critical in providing a solution depending on the student's needs.

DATI's AT Resource Centers have qualified AT Specialists who are available to help sort through the vast array of options.

Take a structured approach

It is extremely important to consider each individual case on its own merits. A common pitfall to avoid is to assume that what worked for one student with a similar condition will work for all similar cases. Each individual case should be thoroughly and methodically approached.

One possible approach to consider is the use of the SETT framework developed by Joy Zabala and Diana Carl. The SETT Framework is a guideline for gathering data in order to make appropriate assistive technology decisions. The SETT Framework considers first the STUDENT, the ENVIRONMENT(S) and the TASKS required for active participation in the activities of the environment, and finally, the system of TOOLS needed for the student to address the tasks. For more information on SETT, check out http://www2.edc.org/NCIP/workshops/sett/SETT_home.html.

If you opt not to employ this type of methodology, you should consider some other structured approach that will help ensure that each student's needs are appropriately accommodated.

Augmentative communication

One of the most common mistakes I see is related to the selection of communication devices. Often, the selection seems to be based on the device with which the speech pathologist is most familiar. Aug comm devices are expensive, and each device has different features. The trick is to find one whose features align the needs and abilities of the potential user. If you are a member of the team, ask questions. Find out those devices with which each member of the team is familiar. If no one has experience with aug comm devices, it may be necessary to bring in an objective consultant.

Try before you buy. After a potential device has been selected, make sure the student gets a trial period where s/he can actually use the device. The AT Resource Centers have a number of devices available for loan. Check to see if we have the device you need. If not, speak with the device sales representative to see what their policy is regarding loaners. Many of the aug comm companies have devices that they make available for trial.

When you do make the final selection, make sure everyone who needs to learn how to use the device does so, including the child's family. Training is key. Training is often provided by the device manufacturer and is usually included in the purchase price. Training for staff and family members can also be written into the student's IEP.

Software purchases

Whether it is designed to help with learning disabilities, visual impairment or literacy, software may be a great accommodation for some students. After you have gone through the process of selecting appropriate software, check to see if the company makes its software available for trial. Many have 30-day evaluation copies available. It makes a lot of sense to try before you buy, particularly with expensive products. Kurzweil makes the Kurzweil 3000 product (a reading, writing and learning solution for individuals of all ages with print difficulties) available on a trial basis. The website is www.kurzweilededu.com/index.asp.

WYNN, a similar product made by Freedom Scientific, also makes its product available for trial. Check http://www.freedomscientific.com/WYNN/Demo_WN.asp.

If you need screen readers to help students with visual impairment, JAWS and Window Eyes both make their products available for evaluation. Many companies are eager to establish relationships with schools and may be willing to accommodate your needs.

Some final notes

The Internet is a powerful tool that can provide a wealth of information. If you are working with a child who has a particular need, check out the Web to see what others have found. When approached properly, the process of incorporating AT in the classroom can be successful and satisfying, especially when you see the difference it can make. As always, if there is anything we can do to help, give us a call. The AT Resource Centers are here to help.

Vendor Training Sessions Scheduled

Note: All trainings are free of charge and will be held at the Delaware Technical & Community College Conference Center (Room 427) in Dover.

Advanced Dynavox

When: November 10, 2003, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

This training is broken into two sessions with a break from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. It will start with an overview of DynaVox products and advance to cover topics such as basic programming and designing searches. Attendees should be proficient in their abilities to modify buttons and link pages. The training will be structured to meet the needs of attendees. Bring your own DynaVox or DynaMyte 3100.

Prentke Romich Co. SpringBoard

November 24, 2003, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

This training will provide an overview of the vocabulary included with the SpringBoard communication device. Customization of the device will also be discussed. Bring your own SpringBoard or laptop computer.

Prentke Romich Co. Vanguard/Vantage

November 24, 2003, 12:30-3:30 p.m.

This training will provide an overview of the vocabulary programmed into the Vanguard/

Vantage communication device as well as offer an opportunity to practice the basic customization operations of the device. Bring your own Vanguard/Vantage or laptop computer.

Enkidu and Saltillo

November 25, 2003, First session: 8:30-11:30 a.m., second session 12:30-3:30 p.m.

This training will consist of two sessions, the first being an introduction and the second session a more advanced workshop. Attendees will be introduced to the ChatPC II and Impact Series (Palmtop, Tablet, etc.) of dynamic display AAC devices. The training will explore available add-on configurations as well as adapters.

Rental policies and funding sources' requirements will also be discussed.

Chesapeake Low Vision, Inc.

December 10, 2003, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

This session will include a review of low vision and its effects on daily living skills, a demonstration of what occurs when eyeglasses and magnifiers no longer work, and training with low vision devices such as daily living aids and telescopes.

Tash Sicare Pilot

December 10, 2003, 12:30-3:30 p.m.

This session will introduce the product's key features for wireless access to the environment. Attendees will set up an ultrasound system, arrange for the Sicare Pilot to control an electronic device with an infrared signal, and control an appliance with the radio transmitter receiver. Configuring and voice training will also be discussed.

The registration form follows on page 15.

Registration Form

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____

Fax _____

Email _____

I am a: _____ consumer _____ parent/family member
_____ service provider

Please check the sessions you will attend:

____ DynaVox, 11/10/03, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

____ DynaVox, 11/10/03, 12:30-3:30 p.m.

____ PRC SpringBoard, 11/24/03, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

____ PRC Vanguard/Vantage, 11/24/03, 12:30-3:30 p.m.

____ Enkidu and Saltillo, 11/25/03, 8:30-11:30 a.m.

____ Enkidu and Saltillo, 11/25/03, 12:30-3:30 p.m.

____ Chesapeake Low Vision, 12/10/03, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

____ Tash Sicare Pilot, 12/10/03, 12:30-3:30 p.m.

Check any accessibility accommodations needed:

____ Brailled material

____ Large print material

____ Assistive listening

____ Audiotaped material

____ Sign language interpreter (ASL or tactile)

Other (specify) _____

Note: We can only guarantee accessibility accommodation if we receive notice at least 2 weeks prior to the training session.

Detach form and return to DATI, duPont Hospital for Children, P.O. Box 269, Wilmington, DE 19899 or fax to (302) 651-6793.

The Assistive Technology Bargain Basement

Marvin Williams, AT Specialist, Kent County ATRC

Hello folks and welcome to the first installment of the AT Bargain Basement. As I find deals on assistive technology, I will pass them on to you. So, what is a deal, you ask? Well, I am going to try to find things for under \$100. Now, as is normally the case, prices may rise or even fall by the time this column comes out. So, the prices that I am reporting are not guaranteed prices, but you still might want to check them out. I also invite all of you to share your bargain finds with me and I will report them for everyone to check out. And now. . . on to the bargains!

My first bargain is the AT&T 1719 Digital Answering System. This answering machine is digital, so there is no tape to rewind or erase. Unfortunately, that also means if you lose power for more than 20 minutes, you will lose your messages. If that does not bother you, then these other features will help to draw you in:

- 19 minutes of digital record time
- Large single digit message counter
- Verbal time/day stamp
- Message guard memory - no batteries required (that is your back-up battery, which keeps you from losing everything immediately when the power goes)
- Remote access allows you to check your messages while away from home
- Toll saver lets you know if you have messages or not by the number of rings before the machine answers (great when calling home is a toll call)
- Call screening/intercept
- Verbal caller ID number announcement



AT&T 1719 Digital Answering System

I was able to find this gem at Wal-Mart, and it is available for purchase on the Web site or in the store for \$19.99. The really nice thing about it is the verbal announcement feature. This is great for folks who are visually impaired. Since most caller ID boxes have small print displays, it makes it difficult for some folks to use. This machine has a clear (but not very pretty) voice that announces the area code and phone number of the person calling. The volume can also be turned up so you are able to hear the number announcement from a different room. The unit will also announce the time and date of messages as well as the calling number.

Programming the answering machine is also easy because the menus are spoken with the same clear (yet not exciting) voice used for the other functions. You are talked through everything from setting the time to setting the toll saver rings.

I have one of these machines and a caller ID cordless phone with the caller ID in the handset. I tend to use the announcement caller ID rather than the handset display. It is also easier to use the announcement caller ID from a different room, thanks to the loud volume. Given the features and the price, this answering machine is a definite bargain.

Our next bargain is the OneForAll URC 4330 Universal Remote Control. It has large buttons for individuals who are visually impaired or who have a difficult time pressing small buttons. Also, the glow-in-the-dark keys contrast nicely against the black body of the remote, making the numbers almost jump out at you.



OneForAll URC 4330

Although this remote does control four devices, you do not have to use it for four. It is a great, large button controller for a television or for any single device of your choosing. I found this remote at Wal-Mart for only \$9.76. Because the price is so low, you should definitely call your local store for availability. Again, the price on this and other items may change, so please check before you get to the cash register.

Our third bargain is the Sony Digital Voice Recorder ICD-B7. For those folks with memory problems, this recorder is great. It is very streamlined, fits easily in a pocket, and the clip on the side makes sure it stays there.



Sony Digital Voice Recorder ICD-B7

This recorder boasts two hours and 30 minutes of recording time. Messages can be saved in two different folders, with each folder holding a maximum of 99 messages. If you have a lot to remember, this recorder will definitely help. There is even a feature that allows you to add more to a saved message. It has an LCD display that shows you the date and time a recording was made. There is even a "hold" button to prevent you from erasing or recording messages when you have the recorder in a purse or pocket. I have seen this recorder at Best Buy for \$49.99. This is significantly lower than the original \$99.99 price when the recorder first hit stores. If you need a recorder, this one is economical.

The last bargain is not equipment, but rather one of the places where you can purchase AT devices. Radio Shack has a lot of devices for the hearing impaired for reasonable prices. They have telephones with flashers, multi-tone ringers, and easy-access volume controls for \$99.99 and less. One available phone with large buttons is available for \$39.99. It features large, lighted buttons; three programmable one-touch buttons for fast dialing; and a flashing ringer with three levels of pitch control in case you need a higher or lower pitch.

Well, that does it for the inaugural issue of the AT Bargain Basement. Again, if you find useful AT under \$100, let me know. And

remember, just because it is inexpensive does not mean it is cheap.

States Take Legislative Efforts to Fund Hearing Aids

Tom McDonough, DATI Funding and Policy Specialist

In the Spring 2003 issue of The AT Messenger, I wrote about the benefit that hearing aids can provide to persons with hearing impairments. I also provided some general funding information and noted many private insurance companies do not cover hearing aids. In this issue, I will address the legislative efforts that have been undertaken throughout the United States to remedy this situation.

DATI research indicates that only five states (Oklahoma, Kentucky, Maryland, Connecticut and Missouri) have laws requiring some form of mandated insurance coverage for hearing aids. However, there are some variations in the age limits, amount of coverage and other conditions. In 2001 and 2002, Maryland, Kentucky and Oklahoma enacted laws requiring health insurers to cover hearing aids for children up to age 18. Connecticut passed a law covering children up to age 12. With the exception of Connecticut's law, which does not address this issue, the other states' laws all mandate that hearing aids be prescribed, fitted and dispensed by a licensed audiologist. Connecticut's law covers the cost of a hearing aid (up to \$1,000) every 24 months, while Kentucky and Maryland's laws cover the cost up to \$1,400 per hearing aid every 36 months. Kentucky and Maryland also provide that, in the case of more expensive hearing aids, the consumer may choose a higher priced hearing aid and pay the difference in cost. Oklahoma's law, which broadened an earlier law covering those up to age 13, goes further than the other states in placing no limit on the amount to be paid per hearing aid. However, Oklahoma does restrict use of this benefit to once every 48 months.

Several years ago, Missouri enacted a law requiring insurance coverage for infant hearing screenings and the cost of initial amplification devices (hearing aids). This year, however, efforts in Missouri to pass legislation requiring insurance coverage of hearing aids for children up to age 19 were unsuccessful.

The experience of advocates in other states has not been so positive. There have been efforts in at least 12 other states to pass

hearing aid legislation during the last few years. Some bills proposed to cover only children, while others intended to cover adults as well. Earlier this year in Connecticut, there was an effort to extend coverage to children 13 years and older but, it appears to have died in a legislative committee. Most proposed bills in other states were similar to the Kentucky, Maryland or Oklahoma models with respect to the maximum amount (or no limit on maximum amount) and frequency of coverage. None of these bills have been successful, with most stalling in a legislative committee. A bill passed by the Colorado Legislature last year mandating insurer coverage of hearing aids was vetoed by the Governor. A number of explanations have been given for the lack of advocate success in other states: post 9/11 state budget crises, rising health insurance costs, partisan politics and philosophical objections. An effort to enact federal legislation requiring insurance coverage for hearing aids also died in Committee.

Given the above picture, what should Delaware consumers seeking legislative action on this issue keep in mind? First, as Oklahoma explicitly noted in its statute, these laws apply only to State-regulated health insurance plans, which are outside the scope of the federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA). The practical impact of this ERISA exemption is that any state law would probably cover only a minority of health insurance plans in Delaware. Secondly, a bill requiring all State-regulated insurers to cover hearing aids would necessitate numerous amendments to the Delaware Code. Finally, it would be realistic to expect that many of the same objections which impeded legislative efforts in other states would surface in Delaware as well. All of this is not meant to suggest that any effort in Delaware to mandate insurer coverage of hearing aids would be futile. However, proponents of such legislation would have to offer a reasoned projection of the fiscal implications, both in terms of costs and benefits, in order to justify this type of legislative action.

**To Contact DATI's Central Site office or the ATRC
closest to you, call 1-800-870-DATI**

Press:

#1 for English or

#2 for Spanish,

Then press:

#3 for the Central Site office

#4 for the New Castle County ATRC

#5 for the Kent County ATRC

#6 for the Sussex County ATRC

TDD callers: Do not press #1 or #2 and your call will be answered on a TDD line at the Central Site office.

DATI Equipment Loan Policy

DATI has a wide variety of equipment at the Assistive Technology Resource Centers for the primary purpose of demonstration and short-term loan. The policy for the loan of the equipment is as follows:

The standard loan period is 2 weeks, defined as the day borrowed (e.g., Monday the 10th) to the same day 2 weeks later (e.g., Monday the 24th). Loans may be extended providing there are no names on the waiting list and/or that an extension will not interfere with an existing reservation. The maximum loan period is 4 weeks.

A maximum of 4 devices may be borrowed at a time, i.e., during any single loan period. However, combinations of devices may be treated as a single device if the components are interdependent - either operationally, or because one component is required for the user to access another.

Equipment loans across State lines are not permitted. Equipment must also remain in Delaware throughout the loan period.

Please Keep Us Posted

Has your address changed? Are you receiving duplicates? Would you prefer to receive the newsletter via email?

If the address we have for you is incorrect, please type or print your correct address and forward it to DATI along with the current mailing label. If you no longer wish to receive this



newsletter, please contact our office or send us your mailing label with “discontinue” written next to the label. If you would like the newsletter sent directly to your inbox every quarter, please contact us to provide your mailing and email addresses. Thanks for your cooperation.

DATI Resource Centers Throughout the State...

Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative

Center for Applied Science & Engineering
University of Delaware/duPont Hospital for Children
PO Box 269
Wilmington, DE 19899-0269
1-800-870-DATI

New Castle County ATRC

Easter Seals of Delaware and Maryland’s Eastern Shore
61 Corporate Circle, Corporate Commons
New Castle, DE 19720-2405
(302) 328-ATRC; (302) 328-2905 (TDD)

Kent County ATRC

Easter Seals of Delaware and Maryland’s Eastern Shore
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