

# ***COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA***

## ***Office of the Governor***

**Mark R. Warner**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Governor**

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### **NEW FEDERAL LAW HELPS PROMOTE ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR VIRGINIANS WITH DISABILITIES**

**RICHMOND** - Governor Mark R. Warner today announced today that new federal legislation will complement and expand efforts in Virginia to give greater access to assistive technology information, devices, and services to Virginians living with disabilities. The U.S. Congress passed, and on October 25<sup>th</sup>, the President signed into law the *Assistive Technology Act of 2004*.

“This new federal law will have significant impact on the lives of Virginians with disabilities, allowing us to expand on the AT programs and initiatives that our state has previously implemented and to continue to support to further the employability and independence of Virginians with disabilities,” said Governor Warner.

The Assistive Technology Act of 2004 extends a previous law that established Assistive Technology Act Programs across the United States. The Virginia Assistive Technology Service (VATS), administered by the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), directs assistive technology efforts for the state of Virginia. Over the years, VATS has distinguished itself and Virginia in a number of initiatives including the following:

- VATS, in partnership with other stakeholders, supported the passage of “The Virginia Assistive Technology Device Warranties Act,” which guarantees people with disabilities who use devices the same protection that customers have for “lemon” automobiles.
- VATS, at the direction of the Disability Commission, established the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority (ATLFA), which provides low-interest, guaranteed loans for the purchase of assistive technology. In collaboration with the ATLFA, VATS received federal grant funds totaling approximately \$3.5 million.

- VATS and the Tech Act Projects in the Mid-Atlantic Region formed a consortium, which partnered with the Mid-Atlantic ADA & IT Information Center, and received a five-year grant to ensure education-based information technology access.
- VATS and DRS developed a model accessible website for all of Virginia's disability services agencies.
- VATS & DRS are now focusing on the establishment of assistive device reutilization programs, device loan programs, and device demonstrations.

“This legislation is an important milestone for people with disabilities and the agencies who serve them,” said Ken Knorr, Director of Virginia Assistive Technology Systems. “It confirms our commitment to making sure that the Commonwealth’s AT programs and activities directly benefit Virginians of all ages and abilities.”

“DRS is proud of the VATS program and the work we do to bring assistive technology resources, equipment, and information to those who use and need them,” adds DRS Commissioner Jim Rothrock. “Increased access to assistive technology means increased opportunities for people with disabilities.”

*The Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) was established in 1990 and funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The program’s mission is to increase awareness of, and access to appropriate, affordable assistive and information technologies and services for Virginians of all ages and abilities. For more information, please visit [www.vats.org](http://www.vats.org).*

*The Department of Rehabilitative Services is the state agency that provides comprehensive programs and services that help people with disabilities maximize their employment and independence. For more information, please visit [www.vadrs.org](http://www.vadrs.org).*  
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