



June 18, 2020

The Honorable Mike Thompson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures
United States House Committee on Ways and Means
406 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adrian Smith
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures
United States House Committee on Ways and Means
1707 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Smith:

COVID-19 has had a significant and detrimental impact on the lives of blind Americans. We urge Congress to pass the Access Technology Affordability Act, H.R. 2086. This legislation will dramatically increase the availability of access technology needed by blind Americans during this crisis.

The Access Technology Affordability Act creates a \$2,000 refundable tax credit for use over a three-year period for the purchase of qualified access technology. In these uncertain times where many blind Americans have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a refreshable Braille display would be a huge help to search for a new position. Where blind children and college students are now learning online from home, a Braille embosser has suddenly become an essential tool to keep up with their classmates. Where many states are enforcing stay-at-home orders, screen-reader software could help keep blind citizens informed of which restaurants and businesses are open and safe for them to visit. These are just a few small examples of why the Access Technology Affordability Act is perhaps more important than ever before.

The unemployment or underemployment rate among blind Americans was likely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has existed for many years. It is why the Access Technology Affordability Act was drafted in the first place. According to the 2017 American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau, 69.5 percent of blind, working-age Americans did not have full-time, full-year employment. The bill will help these Americans enter the labor force by shouldering a small portion of the cost for access technology. This will then eliminate the need for some of them to receive government assistance and will ultimately have them pay the government back in the form of income taxes and employer payroll taxes.

The Access Technology Affordability Act is the best solution for helping blind Americans regain or obtain employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will help blind students both in K-12 and higher education get more of the Braille needed to keep up in school during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the father of two blind children, I have been experiencing this firsthand. For the past three months, we have not been able to obtain the usual Braille, significantly impacting my daughters' education. Finally, it will help blind adults who need to be more self-sufficient in order to comply with social distancing guidelines.

Chairman Thompson, thank you for sponsoring this critical legislation. We also thank Rep. Mike Kelly, the lead cosponsor and Ways and Means Committee member. We extend our gratitude towards Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures members Rep. DelBene, Rep. Doggett, Rep. LaHood, Rep. Larson, Rep. Schweikert, and Rep. Suozzi for cosponsoring the bill. On behalf of all blind Americans, we urge Congress to enact the Access Technology Affordability Act as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Riccobono", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind