UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

MAR - 2 2005

Dear Colleague:

The Assistive Technology Act (AT Act) was amended by P.L. 108-364 on October 25, 2004. These amendments make a number of important changes to the purpose of and activities under the Act, and transfer the administration of the AT Act within the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). While the AT Act allows six months for this transition to take place, this transition has already been completed. Please refer all inquiries and correspondence regarding the AT Act to RSA using the contact information provided at the end of this letter.

Since the AT Act's initial passage in 1988, NIDRR's leadership has been invaluable in helping establish and support the fifty-six comprehensive statewide programs (Statewide AT Programs), thirty-one alternative financing programs (AFPs), and fifty-seven Protection and Advocacy related to AT (PAAT) programs that exist today. NIDRR's contributions to these programs, and the contributions of the programs themselves, have improved the lives of thousands of individuals with disabilities who benefit from assistive technology.

AFPs have played and will continue to play a vital role in the AT Act's emphasis on increasing the provision of and access to AT for individuals with disabilities. A special rule in the AT Act allows the Secretary to award grants under title III of the AT Act of 1998 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005. Congress appropriated approximately $4 million for use under this special rule. RSA will make these funds available through a grant competition that it is currently developing.

States have raised concerns regarding the stoppage of web-based data collection that has been in effect since November 2004. This stoppage of data collection was necessary while the Department sought approval of the data collection instrument from the Office of Management and Budget. We thank you for your patience and for continuing to collect data in other forms until it can once again be entered into the web-based data system.

Since early December, RSA has sponsored a series of meetings to discuss the AT Act with entities that are funded under the Act and stakeholders. RSA hopes to continue sponsoring such meetings as a way of gathering input during the implementation of the AT Act.

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For further information, please contact:

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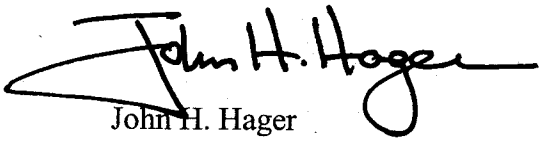
OSERS and RSA look forward to working with all of you during this exciting time and to improving access to assistive technology for all individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,



John H. Hager