

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



RANKING MEMBER *Special Committee on Aging*

**Sen. Casey's Opening Statement
Aging and Disability in the 21st Century:
How Technology Can Help Maintain Health and Quality of Life
May 22, 2019**

“Chairman Collins, thank you for your testimony, and also thank you for this hearing.

“Assistive technology provides an opportunity for millions of individuals to live independently. It can improve the lives of older Americans and people with disabilities.

“Today, we will hear how assistive technology can help members of these communities enjoy the same rights as any individual. We will hear how it gives everyone the right to learn. We know that assistive technology makes it possible for students with disabilities to fully participate in their education.

“We will hear how it gives everyone the opportunity to work – and we know that assistive technology provides the opportunity for older adults to live and thrive in their own homes and communities. And, as a previous witness who testified before this committee, Rick Creech from Pennsylvania explained, assistive technology gives everyone the right to be heard.

“As Chairman Collins and others will recall, Rick testified before the committee with the assistance of an alternative communication device. Without that communication device, someone like Rick might have used a spelling board or may not have been able to communicate much at all. He told the Committee at that time, ‘living without being able to communicate was like being behind four glass walls.’

“This hearing will examine how assistive technology can break down those walls. We hope to raise awareness about the availability of assistive technology for those who could benefit and highlight that far too many people with disabilities and older adults still need access to assistive technology.

“I also hope this hearing will jump start a conversation in Congress about updating the Assistive Technology Act, a law passed way back in 2004 that needs an update. Technology looked a lot different than it does today. Just think of our smartphones—kind of mini computers that we all carry around. Certainly, older adults never imagined the ability of Fitbits or smartwatches to promote healthy living. None of us could have imagined that.

“People who are blind or have limited vision - as Chairman Collins pointed out - didn't imagine they could wear glasses...literally wear glasses that were connected by Wi-Fi to someone who can see what is around that person and communicate the way to get to a restaurant, theater or grocery store. Every week there are new advances that we must harness so that every American who requires assistance can, in fact, benefit.

“It is for that reason that Senator Collins and I will be introducing the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act when we return from recess, a bill that can—quite literally—bring Assistive Technology Act into the 21st Century. This legislation will update the Assistive Technology Act to provide more resources to state assistive technology programs that would expand access for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

“I will also introduce the Access to Freedom of Speech for All Act, that will increase access to information about alternative communication devices for those who have speech and written language disabilities, areas that often limit an individual’s access to education and employment.

“These bills are designed to ensure assistive technology and alternative communication devices are available to those who need it so they can be full participants in every aspect of their lives. And, to help us make the case, I am pleased that we can showcase here today, in the back of the room, the types of assistive technology that we want to get into the hands, or in some cases BE the hands, of seniors and people with disabilities.

“So again, I want to thank our witnesses thank Chairman Collins, for agreeing to hold this hearing today, and I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.”

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