

HB 4611

2019

1                   A bill to be entitled  
2           An act relating to the Appropriations Project titled  
3           FAAST Southwest Regional Demonstration Center;  
4           providing an appropriation; providing an effective  
5           date.

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7   Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:  
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9           Section 1. FAAST Southwest Regional Demonstration Center  
10 is an Appropriations Project as defined in The Rules of The  
11 Florida House of Representatives and is described in  
12 Appropriations Project Request 1664, herein incorporated by  
13 reference.

14           Section 2. For fiscal year 2019-2020 the nonrecurring sum  
15 of \$150,000 from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the  
16 Department of Education to fund the FAAST Southwest Regional  
17 Demonstration Center as described in Appropriations Project  
18 Request 1664.

19           Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2019.



# Issue Brief

## SOUTHWEST FLORIDA NEEDS ADDITIONAL DISABILITY SERVICES

### Goals and Recommendations of the Florida Assistive Technology Advisory Council

The Florida Assistive Technology Advisory Council (A-TAC) celebrates the independency which assistive technology affords Floridians with disabilities. Assistive technology (AT) is tools and equipment that help people live more independently. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, over 22,000 Floridians with disabilities received AT services from the state's assistive technology program, the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST). These services include no-cost device loans, device demonstrations and trainings, equipment recycling, and a statewide toll-free number help desk.

FAAST provides its services through a network of 11 regional centers across Florida. Six demonstration centers provide device loans, demonstrations, and trainings. Five reuse centers accept and refurbish donated equipment for second-hand usage. The State Headquarters operates a statewide device loan program, the toll-free help desk, and a low-interest financial loan program to purchase AT. Demonstration centers are in Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Pensacola, and Tallahassee. Reuse are in Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Largo, Miami, and Pensacola. The State Headquarters is in Tallahassee.

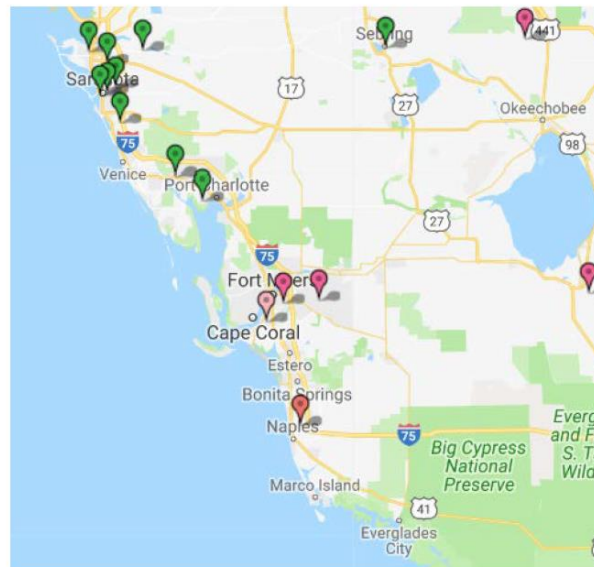
The A-TAC provides direction to FAAST with the mandate of coordinating cost-effective, state-of-the-art services. For every taxpayer dollar invested during FY 2018, FAAST returned \$4.62 in savings by ensuring correct devices were provided to individuals thusly reducing technology abandonment. The major issue identified by the A-TACT is not all Floridians have access to these services.

Regional demonstration centers provided services to 21,637 individuals in Florida's 67 counties in FY 2018. Only 35 people in Charlotte, Lee, Collier, and Hendry counties received services. The reasons for this service disparity are as follows:

1. Since the 1920's Florida's population growth rate has exploded. Florida is the third most populated state behind Texas and California with a total of 21,312,211. Charlotte, Lee, Collier, and Hendry counties have seen a similar population growth. The population is estimated by the University of Florida in 2018 at 1.29 Million for the 4 county area. The percentage of individuals with disabilities that are potential customers of FAAST services has risen in proportion with the state population. However, since 2010, the amount of funding has remained the same.
2. With this growth and because of the Florida climate, more people are retiring in the sunshine state. 32.9% of the population in the four-county area is over 65. From

this 32.9%, the percentage of people with a disability is 36.4%, higher than national averages. AT helps lower health care costs for this population. Personal assistance care is reduced by using modified eating utensils, emergency notification systems, and medication reminders. Mobility aids like walkers and transport wheelchairs, and shower grab bars, reduce the chance for falls. Regional demonstration centers provide a “try out” for this equipment.

3. The two closest demonstration centers are currently in Tampa and Miami. Transportation to and from these centers to the four-county area is time-consuming and expensive. Time and again, Floridians with disabilities list access to transportation as one of the greatest hardships. A center based in either Charlotte, Lee, Collier, or Hendry county will reduce this anxiety.



Map shows FAAST services provided to Charlotte, Lee, Collier, and Hendry counties

#### A-TAC RECOMMENDATION

The A-TAC is requesting additional general revenue funding to increase the access to AT services FAAST provides to Floridians with disabilities in Charlotte, Lee, Collier, and Hendry counties. These funds will be used to establish a Southwest Florida Regional Demonstration Center. The request is for \$150,000.