



Disability
Rights
Oregon

TO: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
FROM: Disability Rights Oregon
DATE: February 13, 2024
RE: **SB 549 (Support)**

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden and, Members of the Committee,

My name is Corinne Schram, I am a Supervising Attorney for DRO's Project Independence. SB 549 would allow users of complex rehabilitation technology to get their chairs and other mobility devices fixed by a technician without having to wait for prior authorization from Medicaid.

Oregon residents living with physical and medical disabilities, seniors, and children with developmental disabilities rely on manual and powered wheelchairs and other mobility devices. Even minor repairs to these devices can take weeks or months to complete. Wheelchair users and independent repair shops are prohibited from accessing the necessary parts, embedded software, tools and documentation needed to perform diagnostic maintenance, or repair services. Some chairs require a software passcode or a physical key for any repairs to be done. Consumers often spend weeks in a virtual queue to get their wheelchairs fixed. As such, wheelchair users can only go to authorized shops for repairs. The delays may cause a consumer to spend time in bed for weeks while waiting and rendering them unable to attend their daily activities like going to work, the store, or social engagements.

Regulations set by Medicare only replace complex wheelchairs every 5 years, and most commercial health plans have no coverage for preventative maintenance. As a result, more than 1 in 4 wheelchair repairs leave consumers stranded at home for some period of time, according to a study published in the journal Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.¹

DRO has worked with many clients who have gone weeks without being able to repair their chair. SB 549 will have a dramatic impact on the quality-of-life experienced by many disabled consumers. DRO thanks Senator Sollman for bringing forward this important bill and urges the legislature to pass SB 549 into law.

About Disability Rights Oregon

¹ Toro ML, Worobey L, Boninger ML, Cooper RA, Pearlman J. Type and Frequency of Reported Wheelchair Repairs and Related Adverse Consequences Among People With Spinal Cord Injury. Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2016 Oct;97(10):1753-60. doi: 10.1016/j.apmr.2016.03.032. Epub 2016 May 3. PMID: 27153763.

Since 1977 Disability Rights Oregon has been the State's Protection and Advocacy System.² We are authorized by Congress to protect, advocate, and enforce the rights of people with disabilities under the U.S. Constitution and Federal and State laws, investigate abuse and neglect of people with disabilities, and "pursue administrative, legal, and other appropriate remedies".³ We are also mandated to "educate policymakers" on matters related to people with disabilities.⁴

If you have any questions regarding DRO's position on this legislation, please call Ben Gurewitz at 971-806-7908 or email him at bgurewitz@droregon.org.

² See ORS 192.517.

³ See 42 U.S.C. § 15041 et seq; 42 U.S.C. § 10801 et seq.

⁴ See 42 U.S. Code § 15043(a)(2)(L).