

Wheelchair Repair Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 16th, 2023

11:30 AM in Room 1A of the LOB and Zoom and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 11:31 AM by Chairman, Beverley Brakeman.

The following task force members were present:

Members: Beverley Brakeman, Sen. Seminara L. S08, Rep. Case, J. 63, Rep. Smith, F. 118, David Morgana, Jonathan Sigworth, Rick Famiglietti, Joseph Shortt, Sheldon Toubman, Wayne Grau, Diane Racicot, John Lee Goetz, Gary Gilberti, Jon Slifka, Ginny Mahoney, Barbara Cass, Jim Carson, Seth Johnson, Susan Halpin, Diane Racicot, Shirley Skyers-Thomas

Absent were: Michelle Duprey, Melissa Marshall, Darrell Ruopp, Jim Carson,

Guests:

Opening Statements & Introductions:

Chair Brakeman welcomes everyone to the meeting and thanks everyone for being at the meeting.

Approval of Minutes (November 2nd & 9th):

Chair Brakeman makes a motion to accept the minutes from the November 2nd meeting, Rep. Case makes the motion, and it is seconded by Gary Gilberti. The motion passes. The Chair asks for a motion to accept the minutes from the November 9th meeting, Rep. Case makes the motion, and it is seconded by Wayne Grau. The motion passes.

Industry Response to Follow-Up Questions:

Wayne goes over questions that were posed to the industry, he states they consulted with other industry members to see if there were widespread industry standards for some of the questions and there aren't any. He states both companies have a minimum of 1 tech per ATP (ATPs are part of the team that is the equipment expert). He states the industry orders multiple parts all at the same time, but delivery time is contingent on the manufacturer's availability. Wayne breaks down the types of chairs they repair, which is a wide variety of chairs. He states common parts they keep in stock are batteries, chargers, arm pads, seatbelts, headrests, and casters. He states the majority of custom rehab parts take at least 3-5 days to ship. He states other custom parts require longer times (cushions, backs, joysticks).

Wayne states that 20% of repairs are done in-shop and 80% are done in-shop (14% and 86% for NSM). He states that seasonality can affect this because people try and get in their repairs before the year's end because of deductibles. He states all 28 techs are located in CT and are full-time. He states technician attrition is 35% because it's a tough job and you have to get the right person who has empathy and cares about people. He states there are 4-6 techs in-shop on average, and the rest are in the field. He lays out the various responsibilities the techs have when they're in the shop. He states Numotion has 740 outstanding service orders for 622 customers and NSM has 687 outstanding for 445 customers. He states on average the companies get 70-85 repair requests per month. Wayne states that the wrong parts ordered are around 1.8-2.1% and it's on the provider, manufacturers don't have data specific to CT. Gary states they are trying to get the data but it isn't easy so it will take some time. Wayne states that both companies have invested in better tracking.

Wayne lays out some causes for incorrect parts being ordered. These include technician error, manufacturers, purchasing entry, consumer chair modifications, and change of insurance. Wayne shows a certain manufacturer's chair manual and how many parts are required just for a perceived simple armrest. He states there is preventative maintenance guidelines and that it has to be part of the solution for the delay in repairs. Gary states that every consumer on the panel has different products and different configurations which makes it even more complex to order parts because everyone is different.

Wayne states there is additional equipment for safe transfers at in-shop locations, and that there are ADA-accessible bathrooms at all locations. He states they encourage people to bring their slings if they need them. He states because of liability the industry was forced to discontinue offering assistance to consumers, and it isn't because they don't want to do it.

Gary goes over the service order process and states it isn't completely linear, that there is overlap and steps done in unison. Wayne states that the industry is required to do consumer surveys in order to improve their services and that they hire a third-party to conduct them. Diane goes over an example of a survey the industry gives and the data from the surveys.

Wayne clarifies that the industry has never stated that all consumers must utilize in-shop repairs exclusively, but that it is the fastest method. Wayne states that they will always offer in-home repairs. Gary goes over the progress of in-shop and satisfaction by consumers. He also goes over data on NSM's progress on service, which is trending upwards closing service requests.

Wayne states that each new tech after the 5-month hiring period can complete 4.5 orders

per day in the home and 7.5 per day in the shop. He states the industry was unable to provide the effect of what additional technicians would have on the issue and states that the issue is complex but that additional technicians would no doubt lower the time. He states it shouldn't be one or the other (just more technicians or just more in-shop repairs) but it should be a combination of both.

Questions:

Rick asks who loads the vans for the technicians to know if the right parts are in it. Gary says it is up to the technician to check if the right parts are in the van. Rick asks if no one is coming into the shop for appointments, and do they send out the in-shop techs to do home repairs. Gary says yes, and they utilize remote technicians as well.

Rick asks how often people are modifying their chairs and causing delays. Gary gives an example of when people modify their chairs on their own, using footrests as an example.

Rick is confused about how in-shop repairs could be faster because of the wrong parts being ordered. Gary states there is a huge time in travel for in-home, and more techs in the field would be more of a cost for the industry because of vans/gas/etc. He states that if they added more techs, they'd have more vehicles, that's more fuel costs, that's more other costs that they can't bear.

Jonathan asks if half of the 28 employees are ATPs and the other half are technicians. The industry state ATPs weren't included in the 28. He asks if techs do assessments, or if it is only ATP. Gary states Jonathan is getting into semantics.

Jonathan asks if the 14 techs are responsible for the repairs. Gary states yes.

Jonathan asks how many respondents to the survey there were. Wayne said 325 YTD.

Jonathan states he appreciates the sentiment to do both in-shop and in-home, and states the consumers aren't opposed to in-shop repairs but they are opposed to in-shop repairs being prioritized.

Gary clarifies that the industry doesn't get paid until the service is complete, and sometimes it takes 90-120 days to be paid after the service is completed. So, there is no incentive for the industry to delay repairs and the notion that they are intentionally delaying because of profits is simply not true.

Senator Seminara asks if they ordered complex chairs from different vendors. Gary states any chair can have different parts from different manufacturers, when they order the parts, they order them simultaneously from all the different manufacturers.

Senator Seminara asks if they wait for all the parts to be delivered before scheduling the repair. Gary says yes, and that they are starting to preschedule deliveries again now that deliveries are being more accurate again.

Senator Seminara asks if there are walk-ins with no appointment that a tech can help or are techs in-shop doing appointments only. Gary states they do have walk-ins, but it's a small number.

Senator Seminara asks if the industry sends their in-shop technicians to do in-home repairs unexpectedly. Gary and Diane say yes.

Senator Seminara asks for both companies to provide more data regarding the wrong parts being ordered. They say yes, but the data will take some time (especially when the manufacturer sends the wrong part accidentally).

Senator Seminara states last week someone said that the in-shop didn't have ADA bathrooms, but the industry says they do. She states there is a difference between ADA compliance and accessibility because ADA hasn't been looked at in a while. She asks if there are people, they can hire to check their bathrooms to make sure they are accessible. Gary says he reached out to the staff to make sure it was up to ADA standards but that they will go back and look to make sure. Wayne states that he hopes they will come to the location and share what would make them more comfortable.

Rick states the Center of Independent Living can make recommendations as well.

Chair Brakeman asks about the ATP ratio. Wayne says it's a minimum of one-to-one, but many of them have more techs to ATP which is favorable.

Chair Brakeman asks for the process to become an ATP and can ATP do repairs. Yes, ATPs can do repairs, ATPs need two years of experience in the business, an exam, and other qualifications that they need to go through. He states there are no certification requirements for technicians and the industry is trying to change it so that they meet minimum requirements, but it can make it tougher to hire techs.

Jonathan asks if there are any states where they ask wheelchair users to assist in the training. Gary states there is more training Numotion provides than training the manufacturers provide, but they welcome any disability organizations to help with training with empathy and awareness.

Jonathan hopes that the goal is to have more technicians for faster in-home repairs, and the consumers are happy to advocate and lobby for travel reimbursement and other things that can help. Gary states there is only one tech in-shop today and the rest are on the road, he states they already have a lot of resources on the road.

Rep. Smith thanks the industry for the presentation and acknowledges the roadblocks and nuance when it comes to timely repairs for wheelchairs. He is impressed by the number of in-home repairs they do, but he feels there will need to be legislative changes to help with in-home repairs. He would like to get data on how many technicians each company would need for in-home repair times to go down to what the advocates suggested, 2-4 days/maximum of one month for preventative repairs Wayne says they will continue to work on it but doesn't want to provide a number and then it not be accurate.

Joe Shortt gives the opinion that if there were more techs the attrition rate of 30% would likely go down because they wouldn't be overworked. Gary says there are several factors to why people quit, and being overworked isn't the only reason.

Feedback to Survey:

Chair Brakeman states she put together a survey tool with all the policy ideas from the Task

Force, and she states she might ask everyone to rate each policy proposal since there are so many based on importance to the individual.

Jonathan asks the plan to balance the report recommendations that don't reach a consensus. The Chair states she is reviewing other reports from Task Forces but that they would restructure it based on agreement, disagreement, and then the final recommendations. She states she doesn't expect there to be consensus on everything and it should be reflected in the report.

She states she wants the survey back by November 29th before the November 30th meeting.

Jonathan thanks everyone from the Task Force for being great to work with and expresses the importance of the report for future wheelchair-related issues in the legislature.

Closing Remarks:

Chair Brakeman wishes everyone a good holiday and thanks everyone for coming to the meeting.

Announcement of the Date and Time of Next Meeting:

- Thursday, November 30th, 11:30am-1:30pm

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 1:08pm.

Chandra Persaud
Task Force Administrator

Nate Kalechman
Minutes Prepared by