

Wheelchair Repair Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, December 7th, 2023

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

The meeting was called to order at 11:30 AM by Chairman, Beverley Brakeman.

The following task force members were present:

Members: Beverley Brakeman, Rep. Case, J. 63, Rep. Smith, F. 118, David Morgana, Jonathan Sigworth, Rick Famiglietti, Sheldon Toubman, Wayne Grau, Diane Racicot, Jon Slifka, Ginny Mahoney, Barbara Cass, Jim Carson, Susan Halpin, Michelle Duprey, Joseph Shortt, Seth Johnson, John Lee Goetz,

Absent were: Gary Gilberti, Darrell Ruopp, Jim Carson, Sen. Seminara L. S08, Melissa Marshall, Shirley Skyers-Thomas

Guests:

Opening Remarks

Chair Brakeman welcomes everyone to the meeting. She states that the meeting will end at 1:00 pm because of a conflict that she has. She states that the task force seems to be getting to a place where the proposal will be refined, even though people will agree and disagree on some things. She explains the process of the final report.

Approval of Minutes – November 30th, 2023

The Chair indicated they would approve the minutes at the next meeting due to concerns about revisions to the meeting minutes not being seen online on the task force webpage.

Announcement of Survey Responses

Chair Brakeman states the survey responses will be released after the meeting after getting approval from legal. She states that the consumers put together an analysis and that she will be

sending it around to the task force to see if the industry has any response.

Rep. Case apologizes for not being at the meeting, but that the task force is heading in the right direction regarding legislative recommendations. Chair Brakeman states that her goal is to have a proposal that will improve the experiences of consumers regarding repairs.

Industry Response to Follow-Up Survey Questions/ Continued Policy Discussions

Wayne states that there are a lot of variables as to how many techs would be needed for repair times to go down, but Numotion opened three new positions for technicians.

Diane states there are five road techs in Newington and three for Niantic. She states they are hiring more and there is more news related to techs coming soon.

Wayne states they are bringing in more techs from Kentucky and have contracted with another company for basic repairs. Wayne states that Numotion opened two new positions for customer service.

Diane states down the road they will be moving to a new phone system to help with customer service issues.

Wayne addresses Jonathan's question regarding seasonality, stating December is the biggest uptick because people want to get repairs in to avoid copays. Additionally, he says March is a big uptick because consumers want adjustments after getting a new chair. He states August-September upticks exist, but they are smaller and typically involve children for back to school.

Chair Brakeman asks if the industry has a goal for repair times. Wayne says Numotion doesn't have a specific goal, but that the biggest issue is addressing the backlog and that will likely decrease wait times.

Jonathan asks Diane if there are three or four road technicians for Niantic, Diane states three Niantic road technicians and five road technicians. Diane states her road techs do evaluations, repairs, new chair deliveries, set-ups, etc. She states that the consumers need to understand what exactly the road technicians are doing and that it isn't just repairs.

Jonathan is asking for clarification on the 4.5 and 7.5 repair rates, and if it includes assessments and repairs. Diane states the 4.5 road visits might be repairs, assessments, or anything. She states it isn't just repairs, it's in-home visits in general.

Jonathan asks Wayne about the uptick in data. Wayne states that December is the highest uptick, which is 20%. He states March is 15% and August-September is 10%. Wayne states again that there is no reimbursement for travel time for in-home repairs, and thanks the consumers for support on reimbursements.

Jonathan asks the industry to give the number of requests for in-home services. Wayne states he can ask. Diane states Jonathan will not see as high of a number disparity as he thinks between requests and fixes because they track tickets anytime someone calls with a potential fix.

Sheldon states he is confused on the number of technicians the industry has, and that he has heard various numbers of technicians from the industry, specifically for Numotion. Wayne states again that it is a total of 14, with an addition of 3, which would be a total of 17.

Sheldon says that Gary said Numotion lost 3 technicians. Wayne states he is not Gary, and Gary isn't at the meeting, so he doesn't know but he can find out from Gary. Wayne suggests that Sheldon put the questions about staff numbers for Gary in an email to the chair for her to forward to Gary to get accurate answers.

Chair Brakeman states the task force needs to start moving forward on recommendations, and she disagrees with the notion that reducing repair is not solely dependent upon the industry hiring new staff. She states the differences of opinion will come on how to reduce repair times.

Jonathan Slifka asks the industry how big the backlog is and what the estimation is on getting the backlog cleared. Wayne states he already shared the information previously but doesn't have it in front of him. Diane states they already shared this information, and that it would take 8-12 weeks but there have been a number of roadblocks in clearing the backlog.

Chair Brakeman states that Senator Seminara has said previously that repairs weren't good before COVID, and to not scapegoat COVID. Diane says pre-COVID they were doing 39~ days to repair, but that approvals for repairs take 8-10 days alone and most people want in-home repairs which take a couple of weeks. Diane states that the timeline of 3-5 days will be extremely difficult because of the various factors and nuances that come with wheelchair repairs.

Chair Brakeman acknowledges that it will be tough for the 3-5 day period and asks the industry what would be reasonable. Diane states they are looking at prioritizing how to get repairs done in a timely fashion, but doing things in a certain timeline will be a challenge.

Rep. Case asks the industry how many repairs are ready to go (no approvals, all parts, etc.), and states maybe the legislative proposal could focus on repairs that are ready to go but just need the labor to do them. Wayne states he will ask Numotion. Diane states well over 60% of the backlog is ready to be repaired.

Jonathan states that the fact 60% of the backlog is ready to go, shows the importance of more staff. Jonathan thanks the industry for working hard on getting more staff. Jonathan states that if there was a timeline deadline, the consumers would likely ask for the effective date of the legislation to not be effective upon passage for the industry to build up staff. Jonathan also agrees that there should be built-in exceptions for the timeline (canceled appointments, consumer can't make appointments, etc.) and that the consumer should be able to waive timelines. He asks the industry if they have any exemptions they'd like to be included. Wayne says he'll get back to the task force, but they would be concerned with supply chain issues and things that they cannot control.

Chair Brakeman acknowledges that the industry has been at the table for the duration of this Task Force and their willingness and honesty in finding a solution.

Rep. Smith shares his acknowledgment that the Chair has regarding the industry. He asks what the implications are regarding pricing if they hire more technicians. Diane states there are no implications to the consumer, the costs are completely borne by the industry.

Rep. Smith asks what increases insurance reimbursement rates. Diane states it must be a legislative fix. Wayne states that the fact reimbursement rates haven't been changed, causes the industry to increase efficiencies.

Chair Brakeman asks the industry about the idea of opening the market to a public option/nonprofit that could do repairs. Diane states they are medical devices that need to be repaired so they must be certified to do the repairs. Diane states MA used ARPA dollars to get individuals to do minor repairs. She states there are ideas out there that could work, but that it isn't as easy as people think because there are so many factors and compliance issues that go into a wheelchair repair. Wayne states that the organization NEAT could be an avenue. Wayne states that they aren't opposed to opening the market but that individuals need to have the training necessary.

Jonathan states that an issue is consolidation, and it happens because Medicaid recognizes companies and that Numotion and NSM can outbid smaller companies for contracts. Wayne clarifies that Jonathan is uninformed about how the bidding process works and that a lot of companies come to the bigger companies asking for them to buy out their contracts. Wayne states that there is value

in private equity companies and that they are not the main problem that Jonathan insinuates they are.

Diane states that complex wheelchairs haven't been in the competitive bids since 2008 and that Jonathan doesn't realize complex rehab codes aren't included in this.

Sheldon gives the history of NEAT but states he doesn't think they are a serious competitor related to wheelchair repairs.

Rick shares his observations and opinions on the acquisition of smaller companies by Numotion.

Jonathan thinks there should be expedited/overnight shipping contracts and pushing for reimbursement and asks if people think that's a good idea. Wayne states that it will be the insurance's decision and won't speak for that industry.

Upcoming Meeting Schedule & Topics

Chair Brakeman states the Task Force will likely need to meet in January, but that she doesn't want to have meetings just to have meetings.

Announcement of Time and Date of Next Meeting

Thursday December 14th, 11:30am

Adjournment

Chair Brakeman adjourned the meeting at 12:47PM.

Chandra Persaud
Task Force Administrator

Nate Kalechman
Minutes Prepared by