

## Wheelchair Repair Task Force

### MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024

9:00 AM in Room 1A of the LOB and Zoom and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 8:03 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, Diane Racicot, Joseph Shortt, Seth Johnson, John Lee Goetz, Jim Carson, Sen. Seminara L. S08, Gary Gilberti, Darrell Ruopp, Melissa Marshall, Shirley Skyers-Thomas

Absent were: Michelle Duprey

Guests:

#### **Opening Remarks**

The Chair welcomes everyone to the meeting.

#### **Approval of Minutes – January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

The Chair asks for a motion to approve the November 30<sup>th</sup> minutes, Sen. Seminara makes the motion and is seconded by Jonathan Sigworth. The minutes are approved.

#### **Discussion of Final Report**

Chair Brakeman apologizes for getting the updated final report to everyone so late. She states she made changes where she felt there was a necessity to make it as accurate and fair as possible. She states that everyone knows the problems, so she will add an addendum to show what other states have done.

Chair Brakeman asks that the stakeholders provide succinct responses, a three-page maximum. Chair Brakeman then opens the meeting up to a discussion about the final report.

Sheldon agrees that the final report should just be clear and succinct recommendations. Sheldon believes it was important for a breakdown from the industry on where the delays are coming from, and that isn't in the final report. Sheldon suggests taking the facts just from the industries presentation from slide 16 from November. Sheldon states regarding the key task force recommendation, the section should be acknowledged that it is coming from the whole task force. Sheldon has a problem with the Chair weighing in on one recommendation and not others, and it could suggest preferences.

T Chair Brakeman reiterates to provide feedback on the updated draft, and that she'll take them into consideration.

Sheldon states while the advocates wanted a certain number of days for repairs, he understands the reason for not specifying the number of days. He also thanks the Chair for addressing the state agency authority piece as well.

Shirley asks what the best way is to capture the impact this could have to DCP. The Chair acknowledges that it could impact various agencies and is aware that any recommendations made to the legislature they will work within the available infrastructure of all agencies.

Shirley asks if there are any numbers in CT for wheelchair users on Medicaid. The Chair believes it is in the report, but DSS's data says close to 5,000 wheelchair users on Medicaid which represents .044%.

Sen. Seminara asks what the deputy commissioner feels the role of DCP will be in this. Shirley says DCP will likely have an impact from recommendation one but suggests DCP work with DSS.

Sen. Seminara states that she is looking forward to DCP's comments and acknowledges that numerous stakeholders will be impacted.

Chair Brakeman asks for each state agency to provide a response to the final report as well.

Jonathan states that one of his suggested edits was to include the number of power and manual wheelchair users as reported by the industry. He states the industry services 92% of CRT users, and that would give a more accurate number. The Chair states that there is a lot to weed through, but that it can certainly be included.

Jonathan additionally echoes Sheldon's remarks and states if the number of days that it takes for the industry to repair isn't included in the Report, he questions the point of the Task Force. Chair Brakeman states it wasn't requested by the industry to leave out, and she's happy to put it into the findings but she isn't comfortable putting the analysis that Jonathan did because it doesn't account for the nuances the industry laid out.

Jonathan Slifka seconds Sheldon's comments regarding the state agency authority piece.

Wayne asks if the addendum information was sent or just the draft report. The Chair says no not yet.

David Morgana states disappointment about the number of days vague, and that it's important to give specific days. He states that the section about annual preventative maintenance on backup chairs, should be more specific on the frequency of maintenance. David doesn't think a legislator can act on the nonprofit issue piece.

Sen. Seminara asks for clarity from David regarding the annual wheelchair repair, and what he meant by an ongoing basis. David states he believes it should be more than once a year. Sen.

Seminara states it's framed in the sense that it requires annual preventive maintenance to ensure it is up and running. She states the likelihood that the main chair and backup chair would both need work is likely small.

Chair Brakeman states that recommendation 3 deals with the primary chair, and 7 deals with the backup chair. She recommends the advocates update their comments regarding the increase in preventative maintenance for the backup chair.

Sen. Seminara states that the industry is in the business of helping wheelchair users and doesn't want individuals to not be mobile. She believes anyone in the industry if you reached out, would want to help someone. The issue is the timeliness and how fast it needs to be.

Gary states that they do everything they can to get people up and running as quickly as possible.

Jonathan believes it would be beneficial to state "all CRT" in recommendation 3, and recommendation 7 focuses more on insurance coverage for backup repairs. He states the advocates will give additional comments regarding the issue David mentioned. Jonathan reiterates again that specific day numbers are important.

Melissa and Rick echo comments made by Jonathan regarding the specific day numbers. Rick believes the industry should come up with a specific number of days, and the advocates as well, and then the legislature has two sets to work with.

Chair Brakeman opens the discussion regarding the specific number of days to recommend, she states less than 6 days is the starting point from the advocates for an in-person assessment, and less than 6 days for a repair once parts and prior authorization have been received by the industry.

Wayne states that the industry has laid out several times all the variables regarding assessments in home and that it isn't feasible to get to an in-shop and an in-home repair time period that matches, and it doesn't exist in any other industry. He states there are labor issues, and it disincentivizes people to come into the shop if it is as fast in-home as in-shop. He acknowledges that they will still have to do in-home repairs. He acknowledges that they will still have to do in-home repairs. Gary states NuMotion has cut down a lot of the backlog and echoes Wayne's statements. Gary states remote assessments are much easier as well but understands it doesn't work for everyone.

Jonathan thinks there should be some sort of on-ramp process for the industry to meet the standards. Jonathan states remote and in-shop aren't feasible for 90% of users. Chair Brakeman stops Jonathan stating that this is just going in circles at this point and his point has been made.

David asks for clarification from the industry related to the disincentivizing of in-shop repairs.

Wayne states that consumers wouldn't want to come in if they are mandated to do the repairs in a certain number of days when in-shop is still faster than the proposed mandate.

Rick believes the industry is giving excuses on why they can't come up with a number of days. Wayne states it isn't excuse, it is a reality that the advocates refuse to accept and gives an example of how the industry wasn't able to hire two individuals because they failed background checks.

Chair Brakeman acknowledges that this is an emotional topic, and everyone wants to help reach a decision.

Jonathan believes if the specific number isn't decided by the industry, then the assumption is the status quo will be maintained.

Melissa believes the analogy for this issue should be that it's like AAA saying when your car breaks down on a highway, that they don't tell you when they're coming to help you and that you just have

to sit and wait for an indefinite number of days.

Rep. Case states his concern is the Human Services Committee can only control 20% of the wheelchair users under Medicaid. He states if a number of days is proposed it can be knocked down by various entities and acknowledges that this is a huge issue and the desire to have a specific number of days is important but that it isn't as black and white as it is being portrayed.

Sen. Seminara echoes Rep. Case's points. She states that they will also work with the other Committees that will have to work on this issue as well.

Rep. Smith wants to reword recommendation one and recommend a number of days for repairs.

Jonathan states that the number of days issue would be a remedy for almost all wheelchair users regardless of insurance.

Sheldon echoes Jonathan's sentiments

Rep. Case states that they can work with regulations with DSS but if you want to work on timelines with other insurers and industries it brings in other people which makes it more difficult. Rep. Case questions whether the Human Services Committee can do a blanket change.

Sen. Seminara states people need to keep in mind that the report isn't going to yield everyone being happy or solve all the issues. She states everyone will still have an opportunity to communicate what they want to be done after the report is published.

Rep. Smith states that the report should be published as a document that is supported by everyone and be a coherent recommendation that factors in all the issues.

Chair Brakeman states she has structured the report in a way to get everyone's input. So, she isn't sure what it means if the entire Task Force isn't supportive of the final report.

Darrell states that it is essential for wheelchair user's CRTs to be functional as fast as possible, and states that the timeline is essential in the report.

Susan states that the format the Task Force is doing is common in the legislature because it gives the legislature various inputs and points of view from the stakeholders.

Sheldon states the advocates are happy to meet with ADS to discuss which agency should be in charge related to the authority piece.

Jonathan is discouraged that specific numbers on days haven't been proposed. The Chair expresses frustrations with Jonathan that he is stating the same point repeatedly and states that the Chair will consider all proposals.

Chair Brakeman states that the industry isn't comfortable with stating a specific number and that the Chair will have to consider a recommendation and understand the advocates' point of view.

Jonathan implores the stakeholders to include a specific number of days in their comments.

Chair Brakeman states that all stakeholder responses and report comments should be sent to her by the 29<sup>th</sup>.

Rep. Smith asks if the group will receive the addendum. Chair Brakeman states that the report would be sent in its entirety by Tuesday morning if everyone gets her comments and responses.

Rep. Case acknowledges that session is fast approaching and that this will be a priority for the

Human Services Committee.

Wayne asks if the Chair wants the responses in a certain format. Chair Brakeman says the way the stakeholders have been sending it in is fine.

Sheldon asks what will be attached to the addendum. Chair Brakeman states it will be linked to what is published online already. She states the findings from each stakeholder will be included, but not the findings from one stakeholder about another stakeholder's findings.

Sheldon and Jonathan reiterate their thanks for the Chair's work on this. Chair Brakeman appreciates it but states it isn't necessary because she is honored to do this work.

Rick acknowledges that everyone has a job to do here and hopes that nobody takes his comments personally when emotions get intense.

Chair Brakeman thanks the Committee Clerk for all of the work she has done on this Task Force.

### **Approval of Minutes – January 18<sup>th</sup>**

Chair Brakeman asks for a motion to approve the minutes. Melissa makes the motion and Wayne seconds it. The minutes are approved via voice vote.

### **Announcement of Time and Date of Next Meeting**

TBD

### **Adjournment**

Chair Brakeman adjourned the meeting at 9:51AM.

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Chandra Persaud  
Task Force Administrator

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Nate Kalechman  
Minutes Prepared by