

Maryland PIRG

HB31: Consumer Protection - Right to Repair - Powered Wheelchairs Economic Matters Committee

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FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG is a state based, small donor funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. We work to find common ground around common sense solutions that will help ensure a healthier, safer, more secure future.

In 2022, lawmakers in Colorado responded to concerns from disability advocates and passed the nation's first law to ensure repair rights for wheelchairs, and we hope you will join them. CoPIRG, Maryland PIRG's sister organization, supported the Colorado effort and released a report, [Stranded](#), to take a close look at the situation facing people in wheelchairs (attached to this testimony).

We surveyed 141 wheelchair users from across the country, the information is pretty shocking:

- 93% needed their chair serviced in the last year, and 68% had to wait 4 or more weeks for repair.
- Some had to wait more than 24 weeks. This causes serious limits to mobility, ability to work, go to doctors appointments, etc.
- One respondent said that "If non-disabled people had to wait weeks or months to get their vehicles worked on, there would be protests in the street!"

One of the main reasons for this is there just aren't enough repair providers through the large national wheelchair dealerships, which have experienced a wave of consolidation over the last decade.

According to those authorized repair companies, a large majority of these repairs are minor issues -- issues that if that authorized repair company can't address in a timely manner, the chair's owner might want to get addressed by another repair expert. In our survey, 68% of respondents to our survey felt that "a friend, family member or independent repair professional with the right information, access to parts, etc." could fix many or all of the problems that caused them to make a service request.

Manufacturers might argue that allowing the wheelchair user to access repair manuals, or software tools, could result in someone accidentally damaging their own chair.

I think it ought to be your choice what you do with the chair you own. It's your life, and waiting months to fix minor issues because the system is broken. Right to Repair provides options for people to make their own choices about what is best for them -- choices that are already being employed by wheelchair users in Colorado to improve their quality of life.

We thank Delegate Kaufman for bringing this legislation and we urge a favorable report.