

**Economic Matters Committee
House Bill 31
Consumer Protection - Right to Repair - Powered Wheelchairs
January 21, 2025
Position: Support**

Disability Rights Maryland submits this testimony in support of House Bill 31, Right to Repair Powered Wheelchairs. HB 31 allows powered wheelchair users and independent repair providers access to manuals, software, and parts, creating more options for Marylanders with disabilities for their wheelchair repairs. The right to repair is critical for power wheelchair users to maintain their mobility, autonomy, and access to community.

The current landscape for wheelchair repairs is ripe for delays and poor customer service.

Marylanders have little choice for wheelchair maintenance and repair providers. The powered wheelchair market is dominated by two private equity-backed companies driven to increase profits and cut spending.¹ “Mom and pop” wheelchair providers and repair shops have mostly been pushed out of the market. When an individual needs a powered wheelchair repair, they can no longer go to a shop down the road. These large companies have little incentive to provide quick, reliable repairs as the bulk of their income is generated by selling new wheelchairs. Consequently, wheelchair users suffer from repair delays and inadequate customer service.

Wheelchair repair delays are not just inconvenient; they are disruptive and dangerous. Wheelchairs are customized to meet an individual’s needs. If one component, like the footrest or movement controls, malfunctions, it can put the individual at serious risk of hospitalization or long-term injury. If a person’s wheelchair is not functioning properly, their life may have to be put on hold until it is repaired. They may have to rely on friends and family to help them with activities of daily living. They may get stuck in unsafe situations. They may miss work, medical care appointments, or meetings with loved ones because they cannot safely leave their house. The right to

¹ *Equity for Whom? An Introduction to Private Equity’s impacts on the Disability Community*, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, (October 2024), (https://dredf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/DREDF_Equity-For-Whom-Intro_October-2024.pdf), at pg. 14.

repair would open more options for people with disabilities so they can avoid this inefficient process.

Powered wheelchair repairs can be prohibitively expensive.

The right to repair would make repairs more affordable, and help people get preventative maintenance to avoid needing repairs. Depending on insurance coverage, power wheelchair repairs can be costly. Many insurance companies do not cover maintenance. We need to expand Marylander's access to wheelchair maintenance and repairs to keep our residents safe and healthy in their wheelchairs. The right to repair would help prevent large, costly wheelchair repairs. When a wheelchair user needs to make a repair, there will be more options in the competitive marketplace, or they could do the repair themselves.

Many people with disabilities who need power wheelchairs may have to get a wheelchair from outside insurance, either because their health insurance has denied their request for a powered wheelchair, or because they are uninsured. The right to repair will provide a lifeline for this group of people. It would allow a person to customize and update a secondhand wheelchair or maintain a wheelchair that they got through crowdfunding for lower cost than going through the original vendor.

People with disabilities deserve autonomy and self-determination.

The right to repair wheelchairs would change the landscape of wheelchair repairs and give the power back to Marylanders with disabilities to make decisions about their wheelchairs themselves. Several states have already made the change to empower consumers with the right to repair for a variety of consumer electronics, and Colorado and California have even included an additional right specific for powered wheelchair users.²

Maryland should also be a leader in the right to repair to empower consumers with greater access to wheelchair repairs, increase competition,

² Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. Part 15: Consumer Right to Repair (applies to powered wheelchairs specifically, as well as other consumer products); Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code Div. 8, Chap.8.5: Consumer Wheelchair Right to Repair; Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42488.2: right to repair act (California has a separate general consumer electronic right to repair in addition to powered wheelchairs.); Minn. Stat. Ann. § 325E.72, Digital Fair Repair Act; N.Y. Gen. Bus. Law § 399-nn; Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. § Ch. 69, § 1 Right to repair consumer electronic equipment; requirements for original equipment manufacturers.

and support local businesses. The right to repair powered wheelchairs would be life-changing for many wheelchair users, and in some cases, lifesaving.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical legislation. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on HB 31. Please do not hesitate to contact me at DariaP@DisabilityRightsMD.org or (443) 692-2487.

Respectfully submitted,

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