



Commission on People with Disabilities
Testimony on Right to Repair - Powered Wheelchairs” (SB382)

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair
February 6, 2025
Senate Finance Committee

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities, I am submitting written testimony that the Commission is in full support of this needed legislation to promote the safety and protection of people who use powered wheelchairs. This bill, “Right to Repair - Powered Wheelchairs” (SB382), would ensure timely, affordable repairs and reduce the burdensome wait times often faced by Marylanders with disabilities. For instance, if a battery or anything else fails, it leaves the user stranded until that person can seek and obtain assistance and that can take hours to receive. In addition, this legislation is crucial for those unable to repair their wheelchair as one doesn’t always have access to a licensed repair technician— especially when traveling.

Senate Bill 382 would:

1. **Require manufacturers** to provide the information, parts, and tools necessary for most repairs of powered wheelchairs.
2. **Establish penalties** for manufacturers that fail to make these specific materials available.
3. **Reduce repair wait times and costs**, ensuring that wheelchair users can receive timely and high-quality service.

This bill is about choice and the ability for power wheelchair users to decide what is best for them when they are dead in the water from a failed wheelchair part. As a power scooter user myself, I have had situations occur where my scooter or power wheelchair fail while outside my home as well as in my home. A power wheelchair that works gives independence and is not confining. If it breaks, my life stops. One example is when my travel power wheelchair had a broken wheel and I couldn’t reach the manufacturer so I stopped at a skateboard shop for new bearings. Manufacturers are not always available to reach on the weekends. It’s important that power wheelchair users get their wheelchair fixed immediately because without a working wheelchair, they are unable to get to work, school, community activities or help their families. Considering additional legislation that allows choices in fixing other durable medical equipment such as hospital beds or walkers is encouraged in the future

Some power wheelchairs have specialized seating systems to help prevent pressure sores and if it fails, they may have worsening skin breakdown. So time is of the essence in fixing a power wheelchair. Manufacturers and durable medical equipment companies should be required to provide instructions and access to parts. I have known friends who waited months for their power wheelchair to be fixed. Would we accept weeks or months if it was our vehicle needing repairs? This bill will help to change the attitude to that power wheelchair users know what is best for them and must have choices

Licensed repair technicians who work for companies that repair power wheelchairs have limited hours and so may not be fixed right away leaving the person unable to use the wheelchair. Powered wheelchair users know that it can take several weeks to schedule an evaluation of the powerchair and then another several weeks to order and obtain the part. For people who can repair themselves, this bill could allow for an immediate repair to the powerchair which would be a great benefit to them. The Commission strongly supports this important bill.