

Edward Mambruno
Ombudsman for the Department of Developmental Services
57 Southwest Road
Waterbury Connecticut 06708

March 4, 2014

Re: In Support of SB 325

Dear Human Services Committee Members,

Hello my name is Ed Mambruno. I am the Independent Ombudsperson for the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and have served as a Commissioner for the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) since 2011. I live in Waterbury, CT and have been a resident of Connecticut for my whole life. I am here to support passage of the Complex Rehab Technology bill, SB 325. This is important legislation that needs to be passed to help people with disabilities get the specialized equipment they need. CRT is an important piece of legislation because many disabled individuals need specialized complex wheelchairs that are fit for their needs and not just some standardized wheelchair.

CRT items are used by people with significant disabilities and require a broader range of services and specialized personnel than what is required for standard durable medical equipment (DME). Customizable CRT items also require more resources in the areas of evaluation, configuring, training, and education to ensure appropriate use and optimal results. Finally, unlike most DME, an interdisciplinary team approach is necessary to ensure proper customization and use of a CRT item entry level manual or power chair. Physical therapists play a large role in aiding a user in finding the most appropriate chair allowing them to use it to the fullest potential.

I myself have a history of pressure sores from sitting many hours that were alleviated by a therapist recommending the proper cushion and functions for my power chair. The main cause of pressure sores is the lack of education and knowledge of proper seating requirements. I use a 4 inch high air cushion combined with tilt and recline seating as well as a new standing function which helps alleviate much if not all of the pressure usually caused by sitting in the chair.

As Ombudsman for the Department of Developmental Services I serve as an advocate to all individuals served by DDS. I have the experience and unique history of the specific requirements needed to prevent health issues and this is the main reason why I believe the Complex Rehab Technology bill needs to be passed. As a person with spinal cord injury I have needed and used CRT for well over 35 years.

It took well over a year to obtain the chair that I am using today. This chair reclines, tilts and reclines, has articulating foot rests and stands. My insurance company did not pay for the standing feature because they stated there was no medical evidence that standing improved health. While I had many white papers stating otherwise they still denied my request. It was obtained through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and for the first few months of using it I can tell you that it has made a difference.

My therapist noticed that the standing feature increased my range of motion and straightened my legs completely.

My provider is Hudson Seating & Mobility and I worked with them to order each individual function of the chair. Dr. Barbara Crane of the University of Hartford was my physical therapist/seating and mobility expert. Dr. Crane needed to write an evaluation as to why I needed these particular functions and especially this specific chair. In addition, my Doctor had to write an additional prescription stating why this chair was needed.

As Ombudsman for DDS I often times see the type of equipment many of DDS's consumers use in their daily life. I have noticed that with the advent of many new wheelchair features DDS consumers have become more empowered allowing them to thrive in the community. It is much easier to shop, go bowling or just walk or keep up with others. It is amazing the advancements that have been made in the last 10 years and this would never have been made by using just standard equipment. No one person needs the same things and with CRT we are able to use what we deem most appropriate for ourselves.

This bill will insure access to complex rehab technology to the people I represent at DDS. They cannot simply use standard equipment. Their diagnoses and medical conditions warrant that the equipment is individually designed to meet their medical needs. I also understand that the bill will include safeguards that only qualified suppliers of CRT provide this specialized equipment. This will hold suppliers of CRT to high standards and help to prevent fraud and abuse.

Please pass this bill. The people I represent at DDS need it.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak today.

Edward Mambruno