



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society
Connecticut
Chapter

Human Services Committee Public Hearing – March 3, 2016
Testimony Regarding
SB 274, An Act Concerning A Study of Streamlining
Wheelchair Repairs for Recipients of Medical Assistance

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Slossberg, Representative McGee, Senator Markley, Representative Wood and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee,

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter is pleased to submit comments on SB 274, An Act Concerning A Study of Streamlining Wheelchair Repairs for Recipients of Medical Assistance. We want to thank the Human Services Committee for raising this important issue.

In our work with individuals living with multiple sclerosis and in the greater disability community, we see that it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals to obtain repair services for their custom wheelchairs. There are substantial delays in getting service in an individual's home. Once the technician comes to diagnose the chair, the repairs must be authorized, parts ordered and then a return visit scheduled. Wheelchair users are often told that parts will be in by a specific date, only to experience significant delays in service without receiving any clear reasons as to why they have to wait. We would like to use a recent example to illustrate the challenges that exist within the State Medical Assistance Program.

MP from Southeastern CT has multiple sclerosis, is paralyzed, legally blind, uses oxygen and has a blood clotting disorder. She needs a customized power wheelchair that tilts and reclines for positioning purposes and to maintain optimal health. At the beginning of December she contacted her vendor because the tilt/recline on her chair stopped working. The wheelchair was frozen and her footrests were almost touching the ground. With her limited vision and sensation, she did not realize that her foot slipped off and she ran over her own foot. Her foot had multiple broken bones and a wound which required hospitalization and surgery. She needed a second hospitalization in January to treat complications that developed.

The wheelchair vendor told her the replacement part would arrive on New Year's Eve and they would repair the chair. That date came and went and she asked for a replacement chair; however they could not provide one. These delays caused significant physical pain and it was emotionally draining for her to be left in limbo and lose her independence. Finally on January 19, the part came in and she got her chair repaired. Now, one month later her wound is still healing.

We agree with the areas suggested for study in the legislation: (1) The average length of time it takes the Department of Social Services to process requests for wheelchair repairs, (2) whether recipients of medical assistance are given replacement wheelchairs while repairs are being done, (3) the

number of complaints from medical assistance recipients regarding repairs of wheelchairs, and (4) the average cost to repair and replace a wheelchair.

If possible, we want to suggest that the study also:

- Examine the types and costs of additional Medicaid claims that may occur because of delays in getting chairs repaired, such as falls and hospitalizations
- Determine if there are biases based on the recipient's type of residence or geographic location
- Identify the number of Medicaid providers who repair and sell custom wheelchairs

Custom wheelchairs are critical to help individuals with significant disabilities maintain their best health and independence. They are a medical necessity. We need to understand the underlying problems with the existing repair system in Connecticut so that strong public policy solutions can be developed to address the challenges.

Please pass SB 274, An Act Concerning A Study of Streamlining Wheelchair Repairs for Recipients of Medical Assistance.

Thank you.

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