

Wheelchair Repair Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 20, 2023

11:30 AM in Room 1A of the LOB and Zoom and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 11:32 AM by Chairman, Beverley Brakeman.

The following task force members were present:

Members: Beverley Brakeman, Sen. Seminara L. S08, Rep. Case, J. 63, Rep. Smith, F. 118, David Morgana, Jonathan Sigworth, Michelle Duprey, Seth Johnson, Melissa Marshall, Sheldon Toubman, Wayne Grau, Diane Racicot, John Lee Goetz, Gary Gilberti, Susan Halpin, Darrell Ruopp, Jon Slifka, Shirley Skyers-Thomas, Ginny Mahoney, Barbara Cass, Jim Carson

Absent were: Rick Famiglietti, Joseph Shortt

**Opening Statements & Introductions:**

Chair Beverley Brakeman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes – August 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting**

Chair Brakeman requested a motion and a second to approve the minutes from the August 31<sup>st</sup> meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously.

(The audio was cut out for a brief moment in the Hearing Room.)

Chair Brakeman reiterated the charge under statute. Stating as a group they started with consumer priorities and what other states are doing. Chair Brakeman referenced 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 from the consumer priority document and talked about finding common ground.

### **Industry Response to Consumer Advocates' Priorities and General Discussion:**

Jonathan Sigworth stated that in-home repair services are essential. The trend is moving towards in-shop repairs but stated consumers need to be protected. In-home repair needs to remain an option. He stressed industry needs to commit to in-home repair services.

Chair Brakeman asked a clarifying question – Are you saying when people need that, but not every home needs that?

Jonathan Sigworth stated yes.

Rep. Case asked does the state of CT covers repairs.

Wayne Grau stated yes, the state does cover repairs. They do not cover travel to the consumer's home or the evaluation time it takes to identify the problem. The state covers the part and the wrench time. The fee schedule is below the cost of the part.

Rep. Case asked for clarification on what Wayne means by the state. Does that mean that DSS or is that the CT employee state medical plan?

Wayne Grau is addressing Medicaid and referred to Gary to answer the question.

Gary Gilberti stated that they are discussing the DSS program and what reimbursement looks like through that cover.

Rep. Case clarified that he wants to know how this impacts self-insurance, private insurance, and Medicaid, not just the Medicaid component.

Wayne Grau stated all insurance covers repairs and is not aware of any that cover travel or evaluation time.

Susan Halpin stated that provided a breakdown of the number of insured and how those plans are governed 1 million covered by Medicaid and under the authority of DSS, million, about 800,000 covered by Medicare which is under the authority of the federal government, and different types of commercial insurance; self-insured which is under the authority of the federal government – ERISA, fully insured which is under the authority department of insurance and subject to CT state law. The fully insured has

three segments – individual, the largest is the ACA exchange; small group market, those employers with under 50 employees; 75% of the commercial market is self-insured and subject to ERISA law. The state of CT only has the purview of about 13% of the entire insurance market on the commercial side.

Gary Gilberti stated that they have backed off their mandate for in-shop repairs.

Susan Halpin suggested the task force might want to invite the exchange, to the employer community, and the Office of Health Strategy.

Chair Brakeman stated her understanding is that most self-insured plans follow mandates in place. Is that true?

Susan Halpin said yes sometimes, but it's up to them to decide that.

Jonathan Sigworth stated this is not something new, but it's proactive because they see a trend moving away from in-home repairs. How many technicians are currently employed in CT for in-home vs. shop repairs?

Senator Seminara asked Jonathan to define what he means when he says in-home repair.

Jonathan Sigworth defined the services as at the consumer's discretion, a CRT provider must have a service available to provide repair and evaluation in a consumer's home. They just want the current practice protected.

Wayne Grau stated that there is a subsection of consumers who are not able to get in-shop repairs, but the industry wants to offer multiple options to consumers. They can get more repairs done, more quickly with in-shop repairs. Said he's never heard of a trend where they are eliminating in-home repairs, in-shop is more efficient.

Jonathan Sigworth stated there are barriers to getting to shops for repairs; transportation and technology issues mentioned.

Sen. Seminara stated that we need to focus on the timeliness of in-home repair.

Chair Brakeman echoed Sen. Seminara's statement about the timeliness issues of in-home repairs.

Johnathan Slifka had a question for the industry what are the things that rise to the level of emergency? Shared a story about a friend as an example stating that he's still waiting for a part and his chair died at the office. When he reached out to the vendor, he was told there wasn't anything we could do for him until the part came in.

Gary Gilberti spoke about timeliness issues including waiting for insurance authorization. Sometimes industry is at the mercy of the supply chain, and they just

don't have the parts available. They are trying their best and there are other factors out of their control that sometimes prevent repairs from being timely. A lot of it comes down to resources and reimbursement.

Sen. Seminara asked if we are still having supply chain issues.

Gary Gilberti stated that there are still shortages of some parts. If they are able to provide a loaner product, we do and sometimes we don't have the loaner parts available. And stated that they also have staffing issues across the country that impact the ability to get products and make repairs.

Sen. Seminara asked where staffing is in the state of CT.

Gary Gilberti stated that they only have one opening in CT.

Sen. Seminara stated all the folks in the meeting understood the industry was trying but asked what needs to happen to make it get done.

Gary Gilberti stated he is in the industry to help people. This is a problem that's bigger than CT. Economically it's gotten tougher. The reason in-shop has been used is to help more people more quickly. He stated his company is committed to making things better.

Rep. Case what was the situation prior to the pandemic? Are we trying to catch up?

Gary Gilberti stated it was much better prior to the pandemic. There were still delays, but it was better.

Wayne Grau stated the majority of the components are made overseas. Prior to the pandemic inventory was slim and caused delays, but they were nothing compared to the delays experienced today.

Michelle Duprey was wondering if there was any data on the remote support call and their success rates. That someone can repair their chair themselves in their home. Personally, Michelle hasn't heard of anyone who has had any success in that.

Gary Gilberti stated they do have successful calls. Sometimes it saves time, instead of 2 trips out, it's 1 trip out.

Michelle Duprey stated she would like numbers.

Chair Brakeman asked Gary to provide numbers for the next meeting on success rates for remote support calls.

Sheldon Toubman responded to Sen. Seminara's comments and stated that it would be helpful to get hard data on average on how long it takes to complete a repair after authorization is obtained. On average how long does it take to complete a repair after a

part has been received? Although we have 20 priorities, the central thing that will fix this is 1, 5, 6, 8, 14 – the maintenance of in-home repair as the standard, the requirement of timely assessment, the requirement of timely repair, and the timelines are enforceable with a state agency given full statutory authority that would solve the problem.

Gary Gilberti stated they track every day of the repair process. We only have 6-7 techs allotted because that's economics. Stated his company lost \$18 million providing service last year. There's no incentive for them to delay, they get paid when the work is done. Stated the industry is here in good faith.

Sheldon Toubman stated the \$18 million loss figure is not meaningful absent “context” in the form of their providing Numotion’s overall profits for the year, just as GM’s large losses on repairs are more than outweighed by their overall profits.

Chair Brakeman reiterated the problems folks were stating, she listed; supply chain, insurance, compensation, or reimbursement for certain services that aren't being provided now. Those are the things in charge of the task force.

Jonathan Sigworth what was the position opening? And customer service reps?

Gary Gilberti said the job position opening is for a technician. There are 41 employees in CT dedicated to customer service for equipment repair.

Diane Racicot 14 technicians dedicated to CT – 8 road, 6 in branch – 8 CS stars and currently fully staffed as of last month. 25% of repairs are still being processed on backlog due to supply chain issues and the pandemic. 33% of repairs are not equipment that was provided to the customer. Business is 48% repairs. The success rate for remote diagnostics is 22%. Average service turnaround (TAT) time pre-covid 35 days. Since COVID-19, TAT has doubled. Transaction cycle time – we have all that and will have that ready by the next meeting.

Seth Johnson the joystick issue is a chip issue and supply chain issue. By the end of October, their company will be fully caught up with joystick issues.

Melissa Marshall had a couple of reflections, transportation issues are not just having car access and stated all of these problems existed prior to COVID-19. Is there a way to look at the business model itself? Because if the business model doesn't factor in repair costs that is a problem.

Chair Brakeman summarizes and thanks everyone for sharing and for their honesty. How do we move forward within the framework that the task force has? The issues revolve around payer status, staffing, and repair. At the next meeting, DSS and insurance will do a presentation and that will be a big issue to tackle. Might make sense for the industry to bring some of the data to show us how it was working pre- and post-COVID.

Rep. Case stated that made sense to him and referenced the public hearing for disabilities and access that he and other chairs sat in. There needs to be more of a comprehensive bill that covers all of it.

Wayne Grau stated they would work on the data for the next meeting.

Susan Halpin stated they will provide some info for the next meeting as well.

Johnathan Sigworth mentioned that it took most of the meeting to just get through the first bullet point and doesn't want to lose out on discussing the points that were not gotten to in this meeting. Suggested that maybe they send out a document to get feedback on those points before the next meeting.

Sheldon Toubman suggested that they get hard data on wait time. What is the market share of the two companies operating in CT? Do either of the companies have any standards that are used in the industry for staffing to customer ratios?

Chair Brakeman reiterated the purpose of the next meeting. The meeting after will be the presentation from the industry on the data and stated folks can email her questions from both sides to put that together for everyone.

**Announcement of Time and Date of Next Meeting:**

Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup> from 11:30AM-1:00PM

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:56PM.

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Chandra Persaud  
Task Force Administrator

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Ash Northey  
Minutes Prepared by