

October 1, 2023
M23-013

TO: SPEEA Council
FROM: SPEEA Council's Legislative & Public Affairs Committee

SUBJECT: **PRESUBMITTED NEW BUSINESS:** Supporting Mobility Impaired Air Travelers

Background

The revised Code of Federal Regulations 14 CFR 234 Airline Service Quality Performance Reports to require airlines classified as "reporting carriers" to report mishandled wheelchair and scooter data in aircraft.

The Department of Transportation reports that on average, 1.5% of air travelers wheelchairs or scooters are reported "mishandled" (damaged or destroyed).

	Year	Number flown	Reported "mishandled"
•	2019		10,548
•	2020		3,464
•	2021	553,969	7,239
•	2022	741,582	11,389

Requirements

- Airlines are required to transport only manual wheelchairs in the cabin of the aircraft in aircraft with 100 or more seats.
- Most battery powered wheelchairs are too large and too heavy to be safely stowed in the seating portion of the aircraft.
- Checked in at gate at least 1 hour prior to flight
- Large and heavy powered wheelchairs are typically stowed in the cargo portion of the aircraft free of charge.
- When your powered wheelchair is stowed in the cargo compartment, the airline must return your assistive device to you in a timely manner as close as possible to the door of the aircraft, unless you ask to pick it up in baggage claim.

Tips

- Attach clear assembly and disassembly instructions to your wheelchair.
- Having written instructions will assist airline personnel and contractors in case your wheelchair needs to be disassembled for transport.

Lost or damaged luggage is an inconvenience for all of us.

For a disabled traveler, the disabled traveler can be without wheelchair or scooter for months as the airline determines fix or replace. Powered wheelchairs are custom made and can take 2-4 months after order to deliver leaving the air traveler restricted or homebound.

US Airlines are obligated to fix or replaced damaged or lost wheelchairs under the Air Carrier Access Act.

Prior to council action (voting) on any proposal for legislative or public affairs, the SPEEA Council's Legislative & Public Affairs Committee shall investigate and produce both pro and con statements and a majority committee recommendation.

Passage or adoption of any legislative or public issues proposal shall be by published ballot and require: Total affirmative vote must be a majority of all votes cast by Council members in attendance.

Stephanie Groce was flying from Washington DC to San Diego via Philadelphia to her wedding.

She watched as a ramp worker in Philadelphia dropped her powered wheelchair (about \$30,000) destroying it beyond repair.

Stephanie was one of the lucky ones. She returned home for her in-house unpowered wheelchair and made it to her wedding. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a power assisted wheelchair, they had to cancel some of their planned activities.

This was not her first wheelchair damaged or destroyed by an airline.

Engracia Figueroa was hit by a BART train that resulted in an amputated leg and spinal cord injury leaving her unable to move without a power assisted wheelchair. The Airline sent her chair to a repair company who is determining if the chair is repairable or replaceable. Until then, Engracia is apartment bound in a loaner unpowered chair. This was the fourth time her mobility device has been damaged (or destroyed) by an airline.

Deanna Vaillancourt-Thompson has a manual wheelchair April 19 – San Francisco – Charlotte to attend a Psychiatric Service Dog Partners Convention, broken brake handle on first flight. On the return flight, the remaining brake handle was broken.

Tammy Duckworth: “Every airline passenger deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, but too often that is not the case,” “I know from personal experience that when an airline damages a wheelchair, it is more than a simple inconvenience — it’s a complete loss of mobility and independence. It was the equivalent of taking my legs away from me again. No air traveler should be left in the lurch, immobile on a plane.”

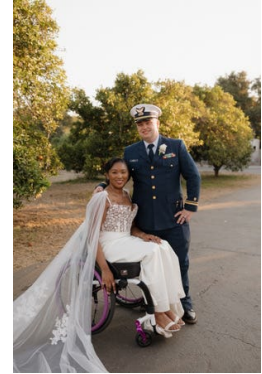
This is unreasonable to deprive our citizens of mobility and SPEEA needs to endorse and encourage better care of handicapped mobility devices and training of airline and ramp personnel.

Pro: Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are essential for day to day activities of handicapped travelers. Airlines are spending millions of dollars annually to repair or replace mobility devices.

Con: Training of ramp workers adds an additional expense to air travel. Each manufacturers chair has different methods of collapsing for transport. Transporting mobility devices takes time away from the ramp workers.

Motion

It is moved that: **THE SPEEA COUNCIL SUPPORTS MOBILITY IMPAIRED AIR TRAVELERS HAVING A RIGHT TO TRAVEL BY AIRLINES WITHOUT FEAR OF THEIR MOBILITY DEVICES INCLUDING WHEELCHAIRS, POWERED WHEELCHAIRS, AND SCOOTERS BEING DAMAGED OR DESTROYED.**



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