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GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES
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Legislative Impact Statement

To: Representative Joseph Solomon, Chair House Committee on Corporations
From: Elisabeth Hubbard, Executive Secretary
Re: 25 House 5017

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

The Governor's Commission on Disabilities' Legislation Committee has developed a Legislative Impact Statement on the bill listed below. The Commission would be pleased to present testimony to the committee. Please contact me (462-0110) if testimony is desired or for additional information.

Introduced by Representative Diaz

The Commission is supportive of this bill, and believe it would benefit people with disabilities. We also believe, however, that it could go further to help people with disabilities by removing the requirement for a prior authorization if the repair cost is under \$1,000.

We have heard from many people that delays wheelchair users experience in obtaining their repairs is an issue of concern. When a wheelchair user loses the ability to use their chair, they lose their ability to leave their home, go to work, and care for themselves. The loss of independence is profound. In Connecticut, the legislature created a special task force to look into the issue. The Commission has begun a research project, modeled on the survey used by Connecticut, to see the extent of the problem in Rhode Island. We have only a few responses so far, but the wait on repairs extends from getting a repair the same day to waiting three months.

There are three obstacles to people obtaining their wheelchairs in a timely manner: the prior authorization process, the time it takes to obtain any necessary replacement parts, and the wait time for a vendor to perform the repair.

This bill assists with the second issue by expanding the number of available vendors and repair shops that could provide the repairs. By having more available options, the wait time for repairs would be shorter. This could help, and we hope that there will be more options available if this bill passes. It is important to point out that, unless Medicaid and Medicare approve these other vendors, individuals who are on Medicaid or Medicare would have to pay for the repairs and replacement parts themselves. As these individuals are usually low or very low income, it is unlikely they would be able to afford to do

so. Individuals on private insurance would likewise be forced to choose between using only the vendor(s) approved by their plan or bearing the cost themselves.

The Commission supports changing state Medicaid rules and requirements for private health insurance so that no prior authorization is required if the repair cost is projected to be under \$1,000. This would remove the delay that is caused by waiting for the prior authorization to be approved. Connecticut and Massachusetts currently do not require prior authorization for repairs costing under \$1,000.

I will be attaching with this statement a copy of Connecticut's task force's final report and an editorial essay written by Congressman Langevin on the issue.

Thank you for your consideration of the Commission's statement.

cc: Representative Diaz

Rico Vota, Governor's Office of Legislative Affairs