

The Village Common of Rhode Island

Aging Better Together

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORPORATIONS

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr., Chair

Testimony by H. Philip West, Jr., on February 25, 2025,
in support of 25-H 5017 by Rep. Grace Diaz, et. al.

Consumer Enforcement of Assistive Technology

Thank you, Chairman Solomon and members of the House Committee on Corporations for this hearing. **I testify in strong support for 25-H 5017 by Rep. Grace Diaz, legislation that addresses problems the widespread practices called “vendor lock-in” or “captive servicing” of electronic wheelchairs, motorized scooters, and mobility devices.**

My name is H. Philip West, Jr., and I serve as a volunteer lobbyist on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, a statewide non-profit that deploys a wide array of volunteer supports to help older adults live safely and independently in their homes. We coordinate crucial services through locally organized and operated villages that serve older adults in Barrington, Burrillville, Cranston, Glocester, Middletown, Newport, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, and Westerly. We are currently helping form new local villages in Bristol-Warren, Exeter, Cumberland, Jamestown, and Warwick. We also serve two groups that have often been isolated: (1) A Southside Providence Village has an active Spanish-speaking caregiver support group, and (2) A statewide community of aging LGBTQ+ members in a Pride Circle. All told, the Village Common now has 525 members and 355 volunteers. Our approach saves money and lives. Our motto is: “Aging Better Together.”

We in the Village Common urge passage of Rep. Diaz’s legislation that would require manufacturers of wheelchairs, electronic scooters, and other such devices to make their documentation, parts, embedded software, firmware, and specialized tools available to owners and independent repair shops.

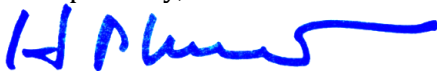
In recent decades manufacturers have begun marketing advanced electronic equipment that requires proprietary software and unique components. Manufacturers routinely restrict access to parts, tools, and repair manuals, making independent repairs expensive, difficult, or impossible. Technology companies increase their profits by driving business to shops they own, control, or authorize, a practice called “captive servicing.”

Such practices annoy owners of smartphones or cars, but they incapacitate those who rely on electronic wheelchairs and other mobility equipment.

Despite resistance from manufacturers, “right to repair” has proven reasonable and fair. Between 2012 and 2024, six states — Massachusetts, New York, California, Colorado, Minnesota, and Oregon — enacted “Right to Repair” laws. After several years of experience with agricultural equipment right to repair, in 2022, Colorado enacted a [“Consumer Wheelchair Repair Bill of Rights.”](#)

Rhode Islanders who rely on electronic wheelchairs and other mobility devices deserve relief from the captive servicing of this vital technology. The Village Common of Rhode Island urges you to recommend passage of 25-H 5017 by the full House of Representatives.

Respectfully,



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