



COMMENTARY

The wheelchair repair system is broken

States must reform insurance regulations that are hindering this essential service for those with mobility limitations

| JIM LANGEVIN

DECEMBER 21, 2023 5:00 AM



📷 Former Congressman Jim Langevin is shown at the launch of the Institute for Cybersecurity and Emerging Technologies at Rhode Island College on Nov. 6, 2023. From left, U.S. Sen. Jack Reed, and Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency Director Jen Easterly. (Michael Salerno/Rhode Island Current)

I have been a power wheelchair user for over 40 years. My chair is custom configured to my specific needs, and I rely on it for my mobility and independence.

It helps me do my job effectively, to socialize with colleagues, friends, and family, and to live more actively in my community. When my wheelchair needs repairs I want it, no, I need it, repaired as soon as possible.

Many of the organizations involved in the process of providing repairs on complex power wheelchairs have been under fire by consumers for [long wait times and insufficient customer service](#) when it comes to repairs on their wheelchairs. As I have dug into this issue, I have come to learn of the tremendous complexity and bureaucracy built into the system and the need for reform of this broken process to allow repairs on complex power wheelchairs to happen more quickly.

First, we must eliminate the burdensome administrative requirements in place delaying wheelchair repair, such as insurance prior authorization, duplicative documentation, and other unnecessary hurdles. While I am all for maintaining a level of accountability that will ensure costs are controlled, especially for minor repairs, the current model is overly restrictive and burdensome, and results in delays that only impact the ability of the consumer to regain their mobility via a functioning wheelchair.

Second, reimbursement for service and repair on complex power wheelchairs is inadequate. Currently, reimbursement policies do not pay for travel time to the home of the consumer. Repairs on many products have capped labor amounts. There is no reimbursement for preventative maintenance on complex rehabilitation technology, or CRT, wheelchairs even though they have parts that wear down with use and complicated electronics that would benefit from staying in-tune.

The result of this is many suppliers no longer provide repair services on products that they sell to the consumer. For those that still do provide repair services, they do so at a financial loss.

If costs cannot even be covered, how can we expect these firms to provide the high quality and efficient service that is desperately needed by their customers? This is basic microeconomics.

Thirdly, it should be a requirement in every state that any company that sells mobility products must also provide repair services on those products. This will create more capacity in the system, reducing backlogs, and creating the opportunity for more expedient repairs for all consumers.





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As someone who has dedicated over 30 years of my life to driving policy and change, I know reform is not easy, but it is possible with the right focus and collaboration. Some of the currently proposed solutions are well intentioned, but in my opinion, do not get to the core of the issue in that they do not fully consider the complexities and realities that I have outlined and could actually make the situation worse.

The need for reform is evident. We must collaborate across key stakeholders and truly listen to one another and solve the root cause issues rather than jumping to seemingly quick solutions. I call on all participants, including policy makers, to deliver this reform by looking comprehensively at the broken system and outdated requirements that contribute to this health equity issue for people living with disabilities.

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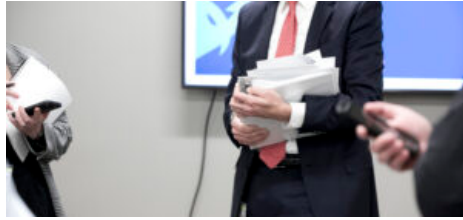


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Jim Langevin left office earlier this year after serving 11 terms as a Democratic congressman from Rhode Island. He was a senior member of the House Committees on Armed Services and Homeland Security. Langevin previously served as a state representative in the General Assembly from 1988 to 1994, and as Rhode Island's secretary of state from 1995 to 2001. In March, he joined the board of directors of Numotion, the country's largest provider of products and services for people with mobility limitations.

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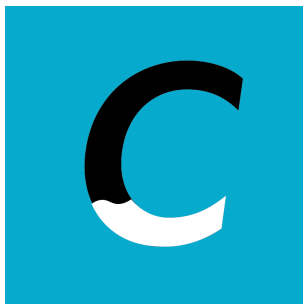
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