



Mobility Aids On Board Improve Lives and Empower All (MOBILE) Act Senators Duckworth (D-IL) and Thune (R-SD)

Problem:

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), more than 25 million Americans—over 14 percent of whom use wheelchairs—report they have disabilities that limit their travel. Yet, thousands of wheelchairs and other mobility aids are mishandled or damaged each year, and this problem continues to worsen. In November 2022 alone, DOT reported that airlines mishandled or damaged 941 wheelchairs and scooters, an increase from 855 in November 2021.

Though DOT is currently required to report the number of wheelchairs damaged each month, it does not evaluate data on the frequency or types of damage to manual wheelchairs, power wheelchairs or scooters. Additionally, passengers who use such mobility aids frequently experience last-minute challenges because many airplane models cannot accommodate this essential equipment, which passengers need for their health and independence. Even though air carriers provide information to passengers regarding airplane models and seating, they do not publish the cargo hold dimensions, which would empower passengers who use mobility aids to make informed travel decisions. There is a clear need for this information to be made readily available and for increased research, evaluation and reporting on how mobility aids can be accommodated in aircraft cargo holds and cabins.

Solution:

Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and John Thune (R-SD) introduced the bipartisan Mobility Aids on Board Improve Lives and Empower All (MOBILE) Act, which would require DOT to take actions that empower passengers who use mobility aids, such as manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs and scooters, and improve those passengers' experiences when flying. Specifically, the bill requires the Secretary of Transportation to:

- Issue a notice of proposed rulemaking requiring air carriers and foreign air carriers to publish dimensions of cargo holds;
- Evaluate the frequency and types of damage to wheelchairs and scooters;
- Develop and submit to Congress a strategic roadmap on researching the technical feasibility of accommodating passengers in wheelchairs in the main cabin; and
- If in-flight, in-wheelchair seating is determined to be technically feasible, assess the economic and financial feasibility of accommodating passengers with their wheelchairs in the main cabin during flight.