



Duckworth rule requiring airlines to report number of lost bags & broken wheelchairs will help ensure travelers are treated with dignity and respect

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WASHINGTON D.C. – As a result of [legislation](#) that was passed by U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a combat Veteran and double amputee, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is scheduled to finally implement a new rule tomorrow that will require air carriers to disclose for the first time how many checked bags, wheelchairs and motorized scooters they damage or mishandle each month. The rule is expected to lower the large number of wheelchairs that airlines damage each year and bring a new level of transparency for passengers with disabilities that will help inform their travel decisions.

“Every airline passenger deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, but too often that is not the case. Travelers should be able to find out if certain airlines have high rates of breaking wheelchairs and other equipment that people depend on, just like we can find out if certain airlines have high rates of flight delays or cancellations,” said Senator Duckworth. “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.”

“Airlines losing or damaging mobility devices has been a major problem for travelers with disabilities. This week airlines will begin tracking and reporting how often they lose or mishandle scooters and wheelchairs, a rule 5 years in the making,” said Carl Blake, executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America. “We appreciate Senator Duckworth's efforts to ensure Congress addressed the Wheelchair Rule in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2018, and we look forward to our members benefiting from this important information.”

Today is International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The DOT rule is being implemented after an amendment Duckworth passed [became law](#) in October, which required DOT to implement the rule within 60 days. Air carriers will now have to begin providing DOT with monthly reports detailing the total number of checked bags, wheelchairs, and motorized scooters they lose, break or mishandle. Airlines have broken 2 of Duckworth's wheelchairs and lost numerous parts of other wheelchairs since she started using a wheelchair 10 years ago on a daily basis.

In late 2016, former-President Barack Obama [announced that](#) by 2018 all U.S. airline services would be required to "report on how often they mishandled wheelchairs so travelers with disabilities can easily compare carriers and make informed travel decisions." However, the rule was delayed by the Trump Administration in March 2017, hours after airline lobbyists wrote to DOT requesting the rule to be stalled.

In response, Duckworth [wrote](#) to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao in April 2017, calling on her to explain the delay of a rule that will protect the rights of disabled commercial air travelers and sharing her experiences, including the time her wheelchair fell apart while she was sitting in it after a titanium rod was damaged by an airline. In May 2017, [Duckworth grilled an airlines lobbyist](#) during a Senate hearing on how the delay caused more stress for disabled travelers, calling on the industry to put customers first and expand consumer protections. Duckworth's experiences were also cited in a lawsuit from the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) demanding the rule be implemented as originally planned.

Since she was first elected to Congress, Duckworth has been a fierce advocate for disability rights and consumer safety. She has led efforts to protect the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and, earlier this year, gathered enough support from her colleagues to [block a bill](#) that passed the House of Representatives this year and would have gutted enforcement of the ADA, rewarding businesses that have failed to make their facilities accessible to people with disabilities. She has also [introduced the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act \(ACAA\)](#) with Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) to protect air travelers from discrimination and Duckworth is a co-sponsor of U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer's (D-NY) Disability Integration Act, which would help ensure Americans with disabilities are given the option to live independent lives and access care in their communities rather than being forced into institutional care.