



# Duckworth, Thune, Cohen, Stauber Introduce Bipartisan, Bicameral Bill To Improve Air Travel For Passengers With Wheelchairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – With disability-related complaints regarding air travel up 50 percent in the last year, U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and John Thune (R-SD), along with U.S. Representatives Steve Cohen (D-TN-09) and Pete Stauber (R-MN-08), introduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation to improve air travel for passengers with disabilities, notably passengers who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids. The bipartisan *Mobility Aids on Board Improve Lives and Empower All (MOBILE) Act* would help ensure the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) takes additional actions to empower passengers who use mobility aids, such as manual and powered wheelchairs, to better prevent more disability-related incidents that occur far too often. Both Duckworth and Thune are members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation (CST), which has jurisdiction over aviation policy. Duckworth is Chair of the Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation.



“As a frequent flyer whose wheelchair is regularly broken or damaged, I understand firsthand how deeply frustrating it is that our aviation system still fails to make sure every passenger with a disability is treated with dignity and respect,” said Senator Duckworth, Chair of the Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation. “No air traveler should be left in the lurch or immobile on a plane, which is why I’m proud that after successfully writing the first law to require airlines to disclose the

number of lost or broken wheelchairs, today I'm building on this progress by introducing this new bipartisan bill. It's long past time we make flying easier and more accessible for the millions of Americans with disabilities who travel by air each year."

"For passengers who use wheelchairs, traveling can oftentimes be difficult and frustrating," said Senator Thune. "I'm proud to join Senator Duckworth in introducing this common-sense legislation that would improve safety and accessibility for individuals who use mobility aids to help ensure their travel experience is as smooth and hassle-free as possible."

"Passengers requiring mobility aids such as powered wheelchairs to travel by air must be given reasonable accommodations and need to know that the FAA is carefully monitoring, and protecting, their rights to fly comfortably and without unnecessary inconvenience," said Congressman Cohen, Ranking Member of the Aviation Subcommittee. "I am proud to introduce the *MOBILE Act* to achieve these goals and am hopeful that significant progress for these passengers will be made."

"Many people with disabilities use personalized, custom wheelchairs in their daily lives, and damage to them can cost a fortune to fix," said Congressman Stauber. "This legislation will bring more transparency to the experience of wheelchair users during air travel and further study accessibility challenges. This is yet another step towards making air travel as safe and comfortable as possible for all passengers, and I look forward to working with Senator Duckworth, Senator Thune, and Rep. Cohen to get this across the finish line."

According to the 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 continue to be mishandled, damaged or lost each year.

The *MOBILE Act* would require 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.

A copy of the bill one-pager is available [here](#).

A copy of the bill text is available [here](#).

“Paralyzed Veterans of America is highly concerned about the continuing lack of safe and dignified access to air travel for passengers with disabilities who use wheelchairs and other assistive devices for mobility,” said Heather Ansley, Associate Executive Director of Government Relations for PVA. “We applaud Senators Duckworth and Thune for introducing the MOBILE Act, which would institute requirements to help decrease wheelchair damage now, while also laying the ground work needed to finally allow wheelchair users to fly with safety and dignity while seated in their devices.”

In addition to Paralyzed Veterans of America, the legislation has been endorsed by Access Ready, All Wheels Up, The Arc of the United States, Association of People Supporting Employment First, Autistic People of Color Fund, Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network, Blinded Veterans of America, Caring Across Generations, Cure SMA, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, Family Voices, Muscular Dystrophy Association, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, National Disability Rights Network, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies, Amputee Coalition and United Spinal Association.

Duckworth has long advocated that Americans with disabilities should receive the dignity and respect they deserve while traveling. As a [result](#) of legislation that was written by Duckworth, the DOT [implemented](#) a rule requiring air carriers to disclose for the first time how many checked bags, wheelchairs and motorized scooters they damage or mishandle each month.

During a recent hearing, Duckworth [called out](#) Southwest Airlines for the company’s lack of transparency, the unacceptable wait times that people with disabilities and millions of other customers were forced to experience and its refusal to heed warnings that could have helped prevent this meltdown before it ever happened. Additionally, Duckworth criticized Southwest Airlines’ lack of accessibility for people with disabilities and secured commitment from Airlines for America that it will support her effort to require the DOT to audit air carrier website accessibility. Following that hearing, Duckworth [introduced](#) bipartisan legislation—the *Prioritizing Accountability and Accessibility for Aviation Consumers Act*—that would improve transparency surrounding the increasing disability-related complaints with air travel.

Late last year, Duckworth [introduced](#) the *Emergency Vacating of Aircraft Cabin (EVAC) Act* to ensure the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does more to prioritize passenger safety by appropriately considering real-life conditions like full flights, the presence of carry-on baggage and passengers who may be children, seniors or persons with disabilities in its emergency evacuation standards.

