

Prioritizing Accountability and Accessibility for Aviation Consumers Act of 2023

Problem:

Approximately 27 million passengers with disabilities travel by air, and yet more than three decades after the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Air Carrier Access Act were signed into law, air travel continues to be riddled with unnecessary obstacles, challenges and discrimination. Americans with disabilities know they deserve better. From untrained staff at the ticket counter to lost or damaged mobility aids, such as powered wheelchairs, to passenger injuries, disability-related complaints during air travel are on the rise. According to a 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) received 1,394 disability-related complaints in 2021, which was a 54 percent increase from the 905 disability-related complaints DOT received in 2019 and a more than 157 percent increase from the 542 complaints received in 2020.

Currently, DOT does not publish a comprehensive report on disability complaints that includes data and information about the number of complaints addressed and resolved, the specific nature of such complaints, the review process or the turnaround time for addressing and resolving filed complaints. There is a clear need to enhance reporting requirements to provide the traveling public with up-to-date data on the Department's effectiveness in helping to resolve the disability-related complaints it receives from the American people.

Solution:

Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) partnered with Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE) to introduce the Prioritizing Accountability and Accessibility for Aviation Consumers Act of 2023. This bipartisan bill would increase transparency about how quickly, effectively and efficiently consumer complaints related to traveling with a disability are received, addressed and resolved by DOT. Specifically, the bill requires the Secretary of Transportation to publish an annual report on several issues, including:

- The number of aviation consumer complaints related to passengers with a disability filed within the last five years;
- The nature of the complaints, including issues with an air carrier, mishandling a passenger's assistive technology, such as a power wheelchair, accessibility of in-flight services, difficulty in being moved or mishandled by staff or having difficulties communicating with an air carrier or its staff; and
- An overview of the review process for such complaints, and description of how quickly each complaint was initiated for review and resolved or addressed.