



Make today a breakthrough.

June 14, 2023

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair  
Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz, Ranking Member  
Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Duckworth, Chair  
Commerce Aviation Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Ranking Member  
Commerce Aviation Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for Disability Provisions and Request to Boost Aircraft Accessibility Standards

Dear Chairs Cantwell and Duckworth and Ranking Members Cruz and Moran:

On behalf of air passengers with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), many of whom fly with a power wheelchair, **Cure SMA appreciates that your FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023 includes several provisions that will help address air travel challenges faced by passengers with SMA.** As this important bill moves through the legislative process, we ask that you consider boosting aircraft accessibility standards to better accommodate the current and future needs of travelers with SMA and other disabilities.

SMA is a neurodegenerative disease that impacts physical strength, which can lead to loss of ambulation and fine motor skills. Many individuals with SMA use power wheelchairs that are customized to their individualized SMA needs, such as extra back and side supports or a repositioning feature to improve breathing. While air travel may represent the most obvious option for work or personal travel, due to distance, many adults with SMA and families with children with SMA avoid or only reluctantly travel by airplane due to persistent challenges such as lost or damaged wheelchairs, injuries during transfers in and out of the aircraft seats, inaccessible lavatories, and an overall experience that is stressful, humiliating, and, sometimes, dehumanizing. *“When the pilot says, ‘sit back, relax, and enjoy the flight’, that ought to refer to everyone!”* said **a mother of a child with SMA**. Cure SMA highlighted air travel challenges faced by the SMA community in a national [report](#) that we shared with Congress in February.

The [FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023](#) includes several SMA community priorities identified in Cure SMA’s *“Good, but mostly, Bad and Ugly of Air Travel for Individuals with SMA”* report. The SMA community fully supports the following provisions included in your legislation:

- **Sec. 610:** to establish a pilot program aimed at making commercial airports more accessible,
- **Sec. 731** to extend the federal advisory committee focused on improving air travel for people with disabilities,
- **Sec. 732:** to study safe and efficient aircraft evacuations for all passengers, including individuals with disabilities who use wheelchairs,



- **Sec. 733:** to develop in-person training standards for airline and contractor personnel who assist with the boarding and deplaning of passengers who use a wheelchair,
- **Sec. 734:** to develop in-person training standards for airline and contractor personnel who assist with stowing wheelchairs and mobility devices in the cargo hold of the plane,
- **Sec. 735:** to publish cargo hold dimensions and conduct technical and economic feasibility studies for accommodating passengers in wheelchairs in the main cabin,
- **Sec. 736:** to collect additional data on the nature and resolution of disability complaints, and
- **Sec. 740:** to promote the availability of on-board wheelchairs on aircraft.

Cure SMA appreciates the steps your legislation takes toward the SMA community's highest priority: allowing individuals to use their own wheelchair as their in-cabin seat, including the technical and economic feasibility studies (Sec. 735) to determine how personal wheelchairs can, someday, be safely secured in the passenger seating areas of airplanes. **Along with these studies, we also respectfully seek your support for the development of new aircraft accessibility standards,** as proposed in the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act, that could be incorporated into existing aircraft to make air travel more accessible, including accommodating wheelchairs in the cabin.

Thank you again for your efforts to improve the air travel experience for people with SMA and other disabilities. Cure SMA and our network of supporters from across the country look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure these disability provisions are included in the final FAA reauthorization bill. For more information, your staff can contact Maynard Friesz, Cure SMA Vice President for Policy and Advocacy, at [maynard.friesz@curesma.org](mailto:maynard.friesz@curesma.org) or 202-871-8004, or Sarah Bellish, Cure SMA Advocacy Manager, at [sarah.bellish@curesma.org](mailto:sarah.bellish@curesma.org) or 202-871-8005.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Hobby  
President  
Cure SMA

Maynard Friesz  
Vice President of Policy & Advocacy  
Cure SMA

*Cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee*