

**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Good morning Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley and members of the Committee. I appreciate being given the opportunity to discuss H.R. 3471, the Veterans Mobility Safety Act of 2015.

First, I would like to thank Chairman Benishek for holding this hearing and Ranking Member Brownley for cosponsoring this important legislation. Automotive mobility plays a vital part in helping our disabled veterans live a normal life after being wounded on the battlefield. This legislation ensures these veterans receive the best equipment by requiring vendors who participate in the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Automobile Adaptive Equipment, or AAE, program to meet minimum certification or accreditation standards.

The AAE program provides eligible disabled veterans with a new automobile or modification, such as wheelchair lifts and reduced-effort steering and braking, to existing vehicles in order to improve their quality of life. However, the VA does not require any type of certification or accreditation from vendors to install or sell these products. Since there are no requirements, VISNs operate based on their own interpretations of VA procedures, which has resulted in VISNs using inferior vendors in an attempt to reduce costs. The modifications we are talking about are highly complex products, which means a lack of quality and safety requirements is putting the veteran and driving public at risk.

Two cases in my home state of Indiana illustrate this danger. In the first case, the VA had a company install an EZ Lock system into a veteran's vehicle. An EZ Lock system is a wheelchair docking system that secures a wheelchair to the vehicle floor. However, the bolt was improperly installed by the company and kept getting caught on things. The veteran complained to the VA, which sent him back to the dealer, whose solution was to cut off the bolt on the bottom of the chair in order to give him more room. However, doing so meant that the wheelchair could not lock into position – something the veteran didn't realize it until his chair moved when a car cut him off and he had to slam on his brakes. Thankfully, the veteran wasn't hurt, but it is an illustration of the needless danger caused by this lack of standards.

In the other case, a dealer subcontracted an individual to come to a veteran's home to install a wheelchair lift. However, that individual never tested the lift. When the wheelchair was on the lift, it pushed the lift down causing it to catch on and damage his bumper. The VA had another dealer take a look at the lift. Their solution? Remove the bumper. Finally, qualified professionals looked at the vehicle and concluded that the lift wasn't even compatible with the vehicle and shouldn't have been installed in the first place.

As a point of comparison, the VA currently requires a certification to sell a veteran a bottle of oxygen, while the AAE program uses an outdated handbook that was last updated in 2000. This inconsistency of procedures has put veterans' lives at risk and resulted in taxpayer dollars being wasted on shoddy or improperly-installed equipment.

My bill, H.R. 3471, Veterans Mobility Safety Act, ensures disabled veterans receive the best quality, performance, safety, and value by establishing a set of minimum standards for vendors who want to participate in the AAE program. Specifically, vendors of adaptive equipment modification services must be certified by a certification organization or the

manufacturer of the adaptive equipment, and must adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the National Highway Safety Administration's Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. Individuals performing these modification services must also be certified by either a certification organization, manufacturer, or the state. Lastly, this legislation puts the veteran in charge of what equipment he gets by giving them the opportunity to make personal sections of their automobiles or adaptive equipment.

Disabled veterans have given so much for our country and they deserve the highest standard of mobility services. The robust, enforceable set of standards that are prescribed in H.R. 3471 will protect our veterans and the driving public while responsibly spending taxpayer funds through the AAE program. I look forward working with the members of this Committee, Veteran Services Organizations, and the VA in addressing this critical issue for disabled veterans. I thank you again for this opportunity to speak today.