



## **National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association**

**United States House of Representatives  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Health Subcommittee Hearing  
Legislative Hearing**

**Written Statement in Support of H.R. 3471  
("Veterans Mobility Safety Act of 2015")**

**November 17, 2015**

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**NATIONAL MOBILITY EQUIPMENT DEALERS ASSOCIATION**

**FOR THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH**

**OF THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**CONCERNING**

**H.R. 3471 (VETERANS MOBILITY SAFETY ACT OF 2015)**

**November 17, 2015**

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley, and esteemed Members of the Subcommittee:

The National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) thanks you for this opportunity to comment on H.R. 3471. NMEDA stands in full support of this legislation, which will establish enforceable minimum standards for vendors participating in the Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). For far too long, the VA has allowed unqualified vendors performing unsafe and/or unreliable vehicle modifications and equipment installations to participate in the AAE program. The Veterans Mobility Safety Act of 2015 will put an end to this dangerous and costly practice.

The VA aims to assist disabled veterans by providing reimbursement (either to the vendor or to the qualifying veteran) for the sale, installation, maintenance, and repair of automobile adaptive equipment through the AAE program. Automobile adaptive equipment (which includes but is not limited to platform wheelchair lifts, under vehicle lifts, power door openers, lowered floors, raised roofs, raised doors, hand controls, reduced- and zero-effort steering and braking systems, digital driving systems, inside and outside power-chair/scooter lifts and environmental controls) then enables veterans with disabilities to accomplish daily tasks and participate in work, education, and recreational activities. The AAE program has wonderful potential but the current administration of the program is alarming, due in large part to the absence of enforceable standards for vendors who wish to participate.

Under current VA regulations, a JCAHO certification is required in order to sell a bottle of oxygen to a veteran yet an individual is not required to possess any

certification (or to demonstrate any AAE knowledge or expertise) in order to install a \$30,000 high-tech electronic driving control system on a disabled veteran's vehicle. In practical terms, this means that virtually any individual or business is currently able to provide – and currently able to receive payment from the VA for providing – AAE services to disabled veterans.

The quality and safety of VA-funded vehicle modifications is directly compromised by the VA's lack of AAE program requirements for vendors. The VA currently pays for disabled veterans to have their vehicles modified and serviced by inferior vendors (e.g., vendors operating out of home garages/parking lots/mobile trucks; vendors lacking insurance coverage; vendors employing uncertified welders and technicians; vendors lacking the specialized tools, training certificates, and equipment necessary to perform AAE vehicle modifications; vendors unwilling to provide emergency service, etc.). Quality concerns range from poor customer service to faulty wiring to chronically unreliable power, steering, and braking systems. Such poor quality installations have very real safety implications and can result in automobile accidents, vehicle fires, injuries, or worse.

Unnecessary spending is another consequence of the VA's lack of AAE program requirements for vendors. AAE installations often require a significant financial commitment. When a veteran complains to the VA about an unsatisfactory or unsafe installation, the VA has a history of referring the repair work to a vendor certain to complete the job properly. It often costs the VA more money to fix the inferior installation than it costs to have the installation performed properly to begin with. Congress can reduce this wasteful spending by implementing H.R. 3471 and requiring the VA to establish standards for vendors participating in the AAE program.

Automotive mobility products can be extremely complex. Even simple installations, if performed incorrectly, can have a disastrous effect. Current VA AAE program policy jeopardizes the quality and effectiveness of installations, wastes taxpayer dollars, and puts the disabled veteran – as well as the driving public – at risk. Through the establishment of minimum standards for vendors participating in the AAE program, H.R. 3471 will force the VA to address disabled veterans' mobility needs responsibly and with long-overdue concern for quality, performance, and safety.

Respectfully Submitted,

National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association