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Assistance at Airports and on Aircraft and Related Airline Training Programs

Challenges Faced by Passengers with Disabilities (Panel)

Charles Brown, Paralyzed Veterans of America

Charles Brown is the national senior vice president of PVA. Brown joined the Marines in 1985 and was trained in aviation ordnance. In 1986, he sustained a spinal cord injury as a result of a diving accident while serving in Cherry Point, NC. During his initial rehabilitation at the Department of Veterans Affairs' Spinal Cord Injury Center, Charles became a member of the Southeastern Chapter of PVA. In 1987, he moved back to his native Missouri where he served on the Gateway Chapter board in a multitude of capacities, including Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator, advocacy director, treasurer, and vice president. In 1999, Charles relocated and joined the Florida Chapter of PVA where he served in a number of positions, including hospital committee chair, secretary, hospital liaison, national director, and president. Charles has also served on numerous national committees, including strategic planning, planned giving, and resolution.

Molly Burgdorf, The Arc

Molly Burgdorf is a disability rights advocate and the Director of Rights Policy at The Arc of the United States. Most recently, Molly was the Senior Policy Attorney at the Center for Public Representation. She previously served at the Office for Civil Rights, the Administration for Community Living and the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She also served as Congressional Legislative Consultant with the National Council on Disability. Her experience includes advocacy to advance accessible, affordable transportation, and protect civil liberties and human rights.

Tony Stephens, American Council of the Blind

Tony Stephens is the Director of Development for the American Council of the Blind (ACB), a national consumer advocacy organization representing Americans who are blind and visually impaired. Previously, Tony served as ACB's Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs, working extensively on policy and regulatory matters impacting independence and inclusion of people with disabilities. He has over twenty-five years leading grassroots campaigns in the public interest sector and holds an M.A. and B.A. in Journalism from the University of Georgia. Tony lives in Baltimore with his spouse and two young sons, and is a vocal advocate for accessible transportation on the roads, rails, in the air, and even at sea, where he is an active participant in Baltimore's adaptive sailing program.

Ken Thompson, Easterseals

Ken Thompson has over 30 years of experience with community-based disability services including 10 years managing a human service agency transportation system. At Easter Seals, he provides technical assistance on issues related to accessibility for people with disabilities and seniors, the accessible environment and public transportation. Previously, Ken worked as a technical writer on electrical systems for military aircraft which was a natural extension of his Navy aviation experience. He has a Masters in Public Affairs from Hood College and has completed the ADA Coordinator's Training Certification Program.

Airline and Vendor Practices (Panel)

Joy Jenkins, Frontier Airlines

Joy Jenkins is the Senior Manager of Disabilities and Escalations with Frontier Airlines. She has operated in several different roles since joining Denver's hometown airline in 2006. Most of her experience has been managing Frontier's team of Airport Operations Instructors in developing and delivering training to airport frontline employees, assisting with new station openings and tracking training compliance for thousands of employees. In 2018, she joined the Customer Care team managing a team of Customer Advocates specialized in handling disability complaints, maintaining regulatory compliance and responding to executive escalations.

Don O'Leary, Delta Air Lines

Don O'Leary is a 44-year employee of Delta Air Lines and currently serves as Managing Director – Vendor Management. In this role, he is responsible for the operations and performance of Delta's airport vendor footprint globally. Previous roles with Delta include director operations in the airline's ATL hub where he managed Delta's staffing, employee communication, and engagement, as well as vendor, airport, and government relationships; general manager – passenger handling/ramp; general manager – alliances; and various other leadership roles. Mr. O'Leary has worked in three airports, as well as two assignments in Delta's global headquarters.

Dolores Tullos, Prospect Airport Services, Inc.

Dolores Tullos is the Academy Director and a Regional Manager with Prospect Airport Services, passionate about arming personnel with knowledge in a continuously changing industry. Over the course of the last 19 years, Dolores has attended classes revolving around aviation support, stays current in the methodology and effectiveness of adult learning, and is a member of the National Association of Safety Professionals. She has also been heavily involved in the advancement of the training structure and requirements for Prospect, in the everchanging employee climate. Based in the DFW area, Dolores continues to cultivate Prospect's Academy in order to ensure that all training is time productive.

Use of Technology to Improve Access (Panel)

Justin Gagnon, WHILL, Inc.

Justin Gagnon is the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for WHILL. Since joining the company in 2018, Justin has been instrumental in leading the sales and marketing teams for both the consumer and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) product offerings. He also oversees sales activities for Scootaround, who WHILL acquired in late-2018. Justin is part of the WHILL team that launched the company's first fully autonomous passenger mobility solution in 2019. As a member of this team, he meets with airports, airlines and third-party aviation service providers to discuss WHILL's technology and how it can improve the experience for passengers with mobility constraints. Prior to his role at WHILL, Justin worked as a Group Account Director for an international marketing agency. He holds an MBA from the University of Manitoba and a Bachelor of Commerce (Hons) in Business Administration from the University of Windsor.

John Kloosterman, United Airlines

John Kloosterman was recently named Director – Regulatory in the Government Affairs and Global Public Policy group at United Airlines, which he joined from a private consulting practice in 2012. Based at United's Chicago headquarters, John manages a team working to connect the company's business leadership with federal executive-branch activity, providing issue advocacy, implementation advice and compliance guidance on a wide-range of strategic and operational matters, including consumer protection. He played an active role in the Department of

Transportation's 2016 ACCESS negotiated rulemaking, leading the airline industry's participation in developing an inflight entertainment accessibility proposal. John's passion for the airline business began early in his career when he joined British Airways as an intern with its Washington, D.C., government and industry affairs office while earning his J.D. from George Washington University. He also holds a bachelor's degree in political science and communications from Albion College in his original home state of Michigan.

[Linda Ristagno, International Air Transport Association](#)

Linda Ristagno is Assistant Director in the Members and External Affairs division for IATA, based in Geneva, Switzerland. In her current position, she acts as the global policy lead for the IATA Accessibility topics, including research, analysis and advocacy actions towards possible or proposed new regulations and policies that might affect IATA's member airlines. Before that, Linda was responsible to advocate industry policies towards international regulatory bodies and ensure that good aviation security measures are in place for the benefit of the industry. Linda holds an Executive Master Diploma in International Negotiation and Policy Making from the Graduate Institute of Geneva.

[Paul Schroeder, Aira Tech Corp](#)

Paul W. Schroeder serves as Senior Strategy Advisor for Aira, <ww.aira.io> which provides people who are blind or low vision with convenient and on-demand, mobile access to visual information. Based in Washington DC, he leads Aira's policy engagement related to state/federal programs, supports Aira's business development, and manages relationships with key organizations. Previously, Schroeder served as Vice President of Programs and Policy for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) leading AFB's efforts to improve services and policies related to the needs of people with vision loss. Schroeder has been an active advocate in a variety of policy areas including the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Communications and Video Accessibility Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Rehabilitation Act.

Ticketing Practices

Perspective of Disability Rights Advocates (Panel)

[Joshua Basile, United Spinal Association](#)

Joshua Basile is a 34-year-old advocate, philanthropist, lawyer, and quadriplegic. In 2004 Mr. Basile's life was flipped upside down while on a family vacation in Delaware when a wave slammed him headfirst into the ocean floor rendering him paralyzed below the shoulders. At the age of 19, Josh formed the nonprofit Determined2Heal. Since 2005 he has dedicated his time and energy to simplify the difficult transition into life with paralysis. In 2007, he created what is now the world's largest paralysis video mentoring network with over 14,500 paralysis related videos — www.SPINALpedia.com. The goal of SPINALpedia is to make sure that members of the paralysis community never feel alone and can always learn from others in similar situations. While getting his nonprofit off the ground, Mr. Basile returned back to school and went on to graduate cum laude from the University of Maryland College Park and magna cum laude from law school. He is currently a trial attorney with the preeminent law firm of Jack H Olender & Associates in Washington D.C. Mr. Basile joined the board of the United Spinal Association in 2016 and is the current Secretary of the Board.

[Tom Panek, Guiding Eyes for the Blind](#)

Thomas A. Panek is the president and chief executive officer of Guiding Eyes for the Blind, a New York-based nonprofit organization that provides guide dogs to individuals with vision loss. Prior to joining Guiding Eyes, Panek was vice president of relationship management at National Industries for the Blind in Washington, D.C. Panek served as President of the World Trade Center Chicago, and began his career in diplomacy, appointed to the United States Foreign Commercial Service. Panek graduated with a master's degree from American University School of International Service, with a focus on Trade Law. An avid runner, Panek has completed more than 20 marathons, including the last five Boston Marathons. In 2019, he became the first blind runner to complete the New York City Half Marathon guided entirely by dogs. He lives in New York with his wife Melissa, their four children, and two Labradors, including his guide dog Blaze.

[David Rosenthal, National Association of the Deaf](#)

Even though David currently is retired, he continues to be active in advocating for greater communications accessibility in our everyday lives. A deaf man himself, David served as a Project Consultant with the Missouri Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped as a liaison between the Deaf community and the General Assembly in Jefferson City, Missouri; Project Coordinator for Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas; Executive Director of the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Topeka, Kansas. Prior to the establishment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, David worked with the Kansas Corporation Commission to establish the Kansas Relay Center. David also served as Manager and Area Manager for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company (now AT&T) in the Kansas Relay Center in Lawrence, Kansas. During his time with Southwestern Bell, David was heavily involved with the National Emergency Number Association by helping Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) improve their communications accessibility in order to respond effectively to people with hearing loss when they call 9-1-1 for assistance. After leaving AT&T, David served as president of the Kansas Telecommunications Industry Association in Topeka, Kansas and later as the director of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division for the Minnesota Department of Human Services in St. Paul, Minnesota before retiring.

Airline Ticketing Practices

[Ray Prentice, Alaska Airlines](#)

Ray Prentice is a 30-year Alaska Airlines veteran, overseeing Alaska's frequent flyer Call Center, the Consumer Affairs team, and most recently as Director of Customer Advocacy. Ray supports guest messaging during irregular flight operations, is Alaska's Liaison to the U.S. DOT's Aviation Consumer Protection Division, and is responsible compliance with consumer protection regulations, including the Air Carrier Access Act. Ray has spent much of his career helping the Alaska Airlines team provide great travel experiences to customers with disabilities!

Seating Accommodations, Including Pre-Flight Seat Assignments and Bulkhead Seating

Perspective of Disability Rights Advocates (Panel)

[Kelly Buckland, National Council on Independent Living](#)

Kelly Buckland, the Executive Director of NCIL, is a person with a disability who has been actively involved in disability issues since 1979. Kelly started his career as an employee for Idaho's Protection and Advocacy system. He served for over twenty years as the Executive

Director of the Boise CIL, Living Independence Network Corp. and the Idaho State Independent Living Council. He has served on the Idaho Developmental Disabilities Council, the State Employment and Training Council, and the State Help America Vote Act Steering Committee. He has worked on issues affecting people with disabilities, including passage of the Personal Assistance Services Act and the Fathers and Mothers Independently Living with their Youth (FAMILY) Child Custody Laws. In 1978, Kelly graduated from Boise State University with a B.A. in Social Work and in 1988 Summa Cum Laude from Drake University with a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling. In recent years, Kelly has been honored with numerous state and national awards, including the University of Idaho President's Medallion, the United Vision for Idaho Lifetime Achievement Award, the Hewlett-Packard Distinguished Achievement in Human Rights Award, and induction into the National Spinal Cord Injury Hall of Fame. Additionally, Kelly has a long history with the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL). He has served on numerous NCIL Legislative and Advocacy Subcommittees and other standing NCIL committees, the NCIL Governing Board since 1998, as NCIL Vice-President from 2001-2005, and as NCIL President from 2005 to 2009.

[Sam Crane, Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)

Sam Crane is Director of Public Policy at ASAN's national office. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Sam previously served as staff attorney at the Bazelon Center of Mental Health Law, focusing on enforcing the right to community integration as established by the Supreme Court in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, and as an associate at the litigation firm Quinn Emanuel Urquhart, & Sullivan, L.L.P., where she focused on patent and securities litigation. From 2009 to 2010, Sam served as law clerk to the Honorable Judge William H. Yohn at the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

[Kathleen Tevnan, Canine Companions for Independence](#)

Kathleen Tevnan is very active in her local community of Silver Spring, MD. She's an advocate for the DC-area disability community, supporting Medicare reimbursement for people who use manual wheelchair complex rehab technology. Kathleen is a two-time Canine Companions for Independence graduate with her much-loved assistance dog Lupe, a two-year-old Labrador/Golden Retriever cross that assists Kathleen in her daily living by opening and closing doors, turning lights on and off, and picking up dropped items. Kathleen enjoys painting and takes weekly art classes where Lupe makes herself invaluable by picking up paint brushes, rolls of paper towels, and even the plastic cover from her paint pallet! Kathleen loves to travel and is a frequent flier.

Airline Seating Accommodation Practices (Panel)

[Kahla Elliston, Spirit Airlines](#)

Kahla Elliston joined Spirit Airlines in July 2014 as a Disability Specialist providing customer service to those traveling with a disability. She soon transitioned to a Department of Transportation (DOT) Specialist serving as the resident expert in all DOT rules, processes, and answered complaints received from the DOT. In January 2017, she was promoted to the role of Manager of DOT Compliance, and in January 2020, Kahla was elevated to Senior Manager of DOT Compliance where she oversees the Disability Department, Refunds, and the DOT Specialist team. Last year, she pioneered Spirit's first mobility roundtable that hosted disability advocates to gain their insights on traveling with a disability, and the effort resulted in the implementation of new procedures to enhance the Guest experience. Kahla is now working to expand the program with additional roundtables and focus groups to help prepare Spirit as the airline continues to grow its fleet, add new flights, and expand into new markets. Prior to Spirit, she worked as a paralegal at a law firm.

Patty O'Regan, Delta Air Lines

Patty O'Regan is a Manager in Delta's Customer Experience and Operational Strategy team for Reservations/Care. Patty began her Delta career 24 years ago in Reservation Sales and currently leads a team of Reservation specialists in reviewing and addressing and resolving disability related customer feedback. For the last 10 years, she has served as Delta's DOT liaison ensuring compliance with government regulations. Patty is a subject matter expert in disability regulations and shares her expertise with cross divisional teams to help make transportation accessible for all.

Dallas Thomas, Southwest Airlines

Dallas Thomas joined Southwest Airlines in 2010. He has developed a unique perspective on accessibility and Customer experience while navigating the ever-changing regulatory environment of the airline industry. His Teams are responsible for ensuring compliance with airline passenger protection regulations with a key focus on disability rights and accessibility. Dallas' passion as a Leader at Southwest Airlines is ensuring that all Teams across the organization work to weave universal accessibility into all aspects of the Customer journey. He is responsible for developing and implementing Southwest's Customer accessibility strategy and serves as a subject matter expert on accessibility policy across the Company. Dallas regularly advocates for advances in accessibility in air travel, participating in industry workgroups and maintaining relationships with multiple disability and consumer advocacy organizations.

Stowage of Assistive Devices

RESNA Standards

Peter Axelson, Beneficial Designs

Peter W. Axelson is Founder and Director of Research and Development of Beneficial Designs, Inc., a rehabilitation engineering design firm that works towards universal access through research, design, and education. Peter has a passion for aviation with almost 3 million miles of commercial air travel. He has also logged over 2400 hours as an instrument rated pilot flying with hand controls. In a research project supported by the PVA Research Foundation, his company conducted testing with 56 manual and powered wheelchair users to evaluate different boarding wheelchairs and to evaluate transfer technologies. The project also surveyed 695 non-ambulatory air travelers to explore a variety of issues related to commercial air travel. As a result of this research project, Peter started the RESNA Assistive Technologies for Air Travel standards committee. As a result of serving on the U.S. Access Board Recreation Access Advisory Committee, he was able to guide the development of universal access guidelines for sidewalks, trails, ski areas, amusement parks, playgrounds, and other outdoor recreation environments. Peter is a regular guest lecturer in the Perspectives in Assistive Technology course at Stanford University where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering and product design after he was paralyzed during training at the USAF Academy.

Perspective of Disability Rights Advocate

Brittney Hernandez, Muscular Dystrophy Association

Brittany Johnson Hernandez is MDA's Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy. In this role, she guides MDA's work across the United States to promote policies that advance the priorities of the neuromuscular disease community. She leads a team that works to promote initiatives that improve access to affordable and adequate health care coverage and services, encourage development and approval of novel therapies for neuromuscular conditions, and protect the rights

of individuals living with disabilities, with a special focus on accessible air travel. Brittany also worked for the March of Dimes, directing work on issues related to access to care and healthcare quality, and on the staff of a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for over eight years, serving as chief policy advisor on health care, transportation, and many other issues.

Airline Practices for Stowage of Assistive Devices (Panel)

[Daniel Budgell, Air Canada](#)

Daniel Budgell is the Customer Service Delivery Excellence Manager - Aircraft Services for Air Canada. In this role, he is involved in the development, review, and upkeep of all procedures that pertain to the loading and offloading of Air Canada aircraft and its partner airlines. Daniel has worked at Air Canada for 23 years. Prior to taking on a role with Air Canada's policy and procedures team in August 2017, Daniel worked in ground operations as a Lead Station Attendant (loading and offloading aircraft) for 21 years.

[Gina Emrich, American Airlines](#)

Gina began her career at American Airlines in 1987 and has worked in a variety of roles focused on innovation and improving the customer experience. She has been involved in everything from working with travel agents, developing codeshare relationships, revenue management, onboard product development, and service recovery. The past 6 years have been focused specifically on the Customer Experience, including journey mapping, data analytics, and the implementation of new products and procedures to improve the customer experience. Her current passion is improving the experience for passengers traveling with any type of disability.

[Jana Leonard, Allegiant Airlines](#)

Jana is a rare Las Vegas native and loves working for her home town airline, Allegiant Air. She attended University of Nevada-Reno and Texas Tech University. She then accepted positions at Kidder Peabody, which was later Paine Webber, where she worked in New York City and Washington D.C. trading securities. She returned to Las Vegas in 1999 with her young family and spent the next several years wearing the many different hats mothers are often asked to wear, including chef, chauffeur, coach, and teacher, among many other things. Jana began working with Allegiant in 2011 in the charters department and was later promoted to the Airport Affairs team. In 2016, she became the manager of Allegiant's ACAA compliance team. In this role, she oversees disabilities training for Allegiant's flight attendants, customer care, and stations representatives and ensures the needs of Allegiant's passengers are being met. In addition, she is passionate about improving the customer experience for all Allegiant passengers, particularly those with disabilities, and leads Allegiant's efforts in that regard.