

Chairman Baldrige, Vice Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 31.

My name is Jeremy Bigelow in just over 10 years ago I was involved in a car accident that left me paralyzed from the shoulders down. Before my accident, I did not realize how flawed the accessible parking system was. Now that I drive an accessible side entry van I constantly come in to contact with those abusing the system. The system needs to be changed and people need to be held accountable for taking advantage of handicap parking. Nine times out of ten when I am out in the community, I see individuals that are more than capable of parking in regular parking and walking a further distance in order to get where they are going. One of the most popular occurrences is those that do not have a placard parking in handicapped parking. By taking these parking spots it puts me in danger. When I have to take my van and try to park in a regular parking spot I'm in danger of someone not seeing my ramp come down from my van and running into me when I'm getting in or out of the van. Another situation I see all the time are those that park in the painted no blue lines next to the handicap parking spots. These painted diagonal blue lines are meant to prevent people from parking there in order for those that are in wheelchairs to properly access their accessible vehicles safely. Imagine you have a ramp that folds down from the side of your van and you come out of the store to get into your side entry van and there is a vehicle parked in the blue diagonal lines on the side of the van and you can no longer open the ramp to get into the vehicle because of where they parked. This is discriminatory and very unsafe for those that are in wheelchairs. One specific example was when I was out to eat with my family. We came out from the restaurant and the vehicle was parked next to me and I was not able to let my ramp down in order to enter the van. We call the police and they said they were busy doing other things that it would be over an hour before they could get there. We went to the restaurant manager and he tried to go through the restaurant to find the person I had parked there. He ended up finding them and they came out disgusted and with no remorse that they had to move their vehicle. Words cannot express how that made me feel. I look forward to going out and enjoying time with my family but when that happens it really leaves me feeling empty inside. I believe that changes need to be made and if this bill was able to be passed we would be able to hold the community accountable and I believe the actions of parking in handicapped parking spots would change. If these changes are not made those in wheelchairs will continue to put their lives in danger while out being valuable members of the community. I believe if local law enforcement is not willing to take this seriously then those volunteers in the community better able to take the actions of writing tickets would be invaluable and would help thousands statewide. Thank you for your understanding and your time. I respectfully ask for your support of this legislation. Thank you all for your time and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.

Respectfully,

Jeremy Bigelow

jbigelow22@gmail.com

419-297-2906