New York State Legislative Hearing February 6, 2026

Submitted by:
Latavia Sturdivant
Ms. Wheelchair America 2026
Certified Lead Advocate, Amputee Coalition
Licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (NY & ME)
Adjunct Professor, Lehman College (CUNY)
Host, Content Creator, and Editor, *Queens On A Roll* Podcast

—

Good Day Chair and Members of the Senate & Assembly,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **Medicaid parity in New York State**.

My name is Latavia Sturdivant. I am a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist in New York and Maine, an adjunct professor at Lehman College, a Certified Lead Advocate with the Amputee Coalition, the host, content creator, and editor of the *Queens On A Roll* podcast, and the current Ms. Wheelchair America 2026. I also rely on durable medical equipment every single day—not as a convenience, but as the foundation of my independence, my career, and my ability to fully participate in my community.

I want to be clear: **durable medical equipment is not optional—it is essential healthcare.**

Over the last several years, it has become increasingly difficult for me to obtain timely wheelchair repair appointments. What once felt manageable now feels overwhelming. Last year, while I was on my way to an advocacy event, the back of my wheelchair suddenly collapsed. In that moment, my mobility, my safety, and my ability to do my job were taken away.

Despite the urgency, I waited **two months** just for an evaluation appointment. There were no other appointments available, and I could not go elsewhere because only **two national wheelchair vendors currently operate in downstate New York**. After the evaluation, it took an additional **four months** for the repair to be completed.

During that time, my life became smaller. I had to rethink where I could go, how long I could stay out, and whether I could safely do my job. My independence was no longer guaranteed—it depended on a system that moved far too slowly for someone who cannot function without their equipment.

I have also seen a noticeable decline in the quality of the equipment being provided. I now have to replace my wheelchair casters far more frequently—not because of normal wear, but because rubber falls off or the casters crack in half. In the past, replacements were only needed when tire treads naturally wore down. Today, equipment fails faster, and each failure brings stress, disruption, and fear of what might happen next.

Those fears became reality after I recently returned from a trip to South Dakota, when Delta Airlines damaged my wheelchair. The only vendors that accept Delta's insurance are **a National Seating & Mobility location on Long Island and a provider in New Jersey**—neither of which I can safely travel to, given my wheelchair's current condition. As a result, I am forced to pay out of pocket to have my chair repaired locally in the Bronx and then seek reimbursement later. This is financially burdensome and emotionally exhausting, but I have no choice. My wheelchair is my freedom, and I cannot wait months to live my life.

This is what prolonged legislative inaction looks like in real life. It looks like waiting while your mobility is compromised. It looks like paying out of pocket because systems have failed. It looks like fear that the same consolidation and provider loss that has harmed wheelchair users will continue in the brace and prosthetics industry—an industry that has already experienced approximately a **20% attrition rate over the past decade**.

When I do not have access to my braces, I cannot stand on my legs. My braces are medically necessary to keep my feet properly aligned, support my body, and prevent painful and permanent contractures. Without them, my physical health declines, and the risk of permanent harm increases. These devices are not optional or interchangeable—they are essential to maintaining mobility and preventing long-term injury. Continued consolidation of orthotics and prosthetics services will only increase delays and reduce access, placing people like me at serious risk of harm.

I share my story not for sympathy, but for understanding and action. My wheelchair and braces are how I work, how I serve my community, and how I live independently. When access to care is delayed, so is my ability to fully participate in my life and contribute in meaningful ways.

I ask you to remember that behind every reimbursement rate and every policy decision is a real person whose independence hangs in the balance. You have the power to decide whether New Yorkers with disabilities are forced to wait months to move, stand, work, and live—or whether they receive timely access to the care that sustains their lives.

I respectfully urge the New York State Senate & Assembly to pass Medicaid parity, modernize reimbursement rates, and protect independence and dignity for New Yorkers who rely on these systems every day.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your willingness to listen.

Respectfully submitted,
Latavia Sturdivant