

Public Meeting on Air Travel by Persons Who Use Wheelchairs Speaker Biographies

Heather L. Ansley

Heather L. Ansley is the Associate Executive Director of Government Relations at Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). Her responsibilities include managing the organization's efforts on Capitol Hill and working with the Administration to promote legislation and policies that ensure veterans with catastrophic disabilities receive the health care and benefits that they have earned and the civil rights protections that they deserve. She also works to promote collaboration between disability organizations and veterans service organizations and currently serves as the Immediate Past Chair of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities and on the board of the Disability Rights Bar Association. Ms. Ansley holds a BA and MSW from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a JD from the Washburn University School of Law in Kansas.

Peter Axelson

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 2,400 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.

Kelly Buckland

Kelly Buckland is a person with a disability who has been actively involved in disability issues since 1979. Kelly graduated from Boise State University with a B.A. in Social Work and 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. He has testified before Congress numerous times on issues such as universal health care, Fair Housing, appropriations for centers for independent living, Olmstead and COVID 19. He has been closely involved with the direct-service and systemic change aspects of the disability rights movement. Additionally, Kelly has a long history with the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL). He served on the NCIL Governing Board from 1998 until 2021, as NCIL Vice-President from 2001-2005, and as NCIL President from 2005 to 2009. And as the Executive Director from 2009 until 2021.

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Graham Keithley

Graham Keithley is Vice President and Associate General Counsel of Airlines for America (A4A), which is the trade association for major U.S. airlines, both passenger and cargo. In his role, he is the staff liaison to A4A's Passenger Accessibility Committee, which is comprised of the member airlines' accessibility leads and serves as a forum to address industry-wide accessibility issues, exchange information, and the development of industry best practices. On behalf of A4A's members, he also is involved in numerous industry and government efforts, domestic and international, to improve air transportation accessibility. He also counsels A4A's member airlines on a range of other regulatory issues at the international, federal, state, and local levels.

John E. Putnam

John E. Putnam is the Deputy General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Transportation and the nominee for General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Transportation. He works closely with the Department's senior leadership and nearly 500 attorneys to manage legal and policy matters concerning all of the Department's operating administrations.

Prior to joining the Biden Administration, John worked most of his career as a transportation, environment, and energy attorney in Denver and Washington, DC. He represented State departments of transportation, local governments, transportation agencies, and private entities in Colorado and nationwide on a range of transportation, energy, environmental issues under the Federal transportation laws, the Clean Air Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Clean Water Act.

Linda Ristagno

Linda leads the accessibility program for the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and promotes the development of consistent policy and multilateral dialogue by working with policymakers, member airlines, industry stakeholders and passengers with disabilities. She is the secretary of the Accessibility Working Group that drives the execution of the IATA's accessibility strategy through regular consultation with disability associations, regulators, airports, and international organizations. Linda holds an Executive Master Diploma in International Negotiation and Policymaking with the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies of Geneva.

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Jim Sinocchi

Jim Sinocchi is Head of the global Office of Disability Inclusion at JPMorgan Chase. Jim works with leaders and employees across the firm to set the strategy for driving an inclusive culture for recruiting, hiring and promoting qualified people with disabilities. His office also supports employees who serve as caregivers.

In 2019, Jim was appointed chair of the 19-member federal Air Carrier Access Act Advisory Committee. Having sustained a spinal cord injury early in his business career, he is keenly aware of the challenges facing people with disabilities from both the employment and travel perspectives. He serves on the Board of Directors for several nonprofits and has represented the firm at the United Nations on International Day of Persons with Disabilities for four consecutive years.

Emily Voorde

Emily Voorde serves as the Biden Administration's White House Associate Director of Disability Outreach in the Office of Public Engagement. She was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta and is a wheelchair user. Much of her work in the White House is ensuring that space is carved out for voices of persons with disabilities across policy issues. Among her many roles is soliciting input from multiple-marginalized populations through Listening Sessions, partnering with Agencies to ensure that policy reaches stakeholders, and recommending opportunities for the President, First Lady, Vice President, and Second Gentleman to engage with the disability community in meaningful ways.