

Opening Statement of Chair George D. Bedwick  
February 21, 2019

Thank you all for joining us, and a special thanks to the agencies and other stakeholders who are taking the time to participate today. This is IRRC's first public hearing in its 35-year history. While IRRC's role in the regulatory review process is an important one – determining whether each regulation is in the public interest - my fellow Commissioners and I are not policy-makers (nor do we wish to be). What we can do, however, is gather information, foster collaboration, and – we hope – achieve consensus among stakeholders on important issues for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

One of the main goals of our hearing today is to provide a forum for an exchange of information and ideas on one such issue: the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles. This topic that has been before us before in numerous rulemakings and a topic we expect to see again. It is a subject that has generated widespread comments, impassioned public input, and heartfelt remarks. The information gathered today will allow us and other governmental agencies to better evaluate existing and future regulations addressing the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the Commonwealth. It will also assist us in our determination of whether such rulemakings are in the public interest.

A recent report ranked Pennsylvania 19<sup>th</sup> in the nation in serving residents with disabilities. This ranking is 10 places higher than the prior year, and I know that our Governor and each and every member of the General Assembly are solidly committed to reaching the top place in the nation in serving this community as soon as possible. The progress our state has made in improving our disabilities policies is encouraging, as are the steps being taken by agencies across the Commonwealth in that regard. Today we will hear from agencies working toward the goal of being number one. They and other stakeholders will provide an update on where the Commonwealth stands on a narrow but important area: accessibility to wheelchair accessible vehicle service in Pennsylvania.

Our hearing will provide a forum to discuss this topic and learn more about recent developments in this area. Like every IRRC meeting, it is an opportunity to exchange ideas through written comments, witness testimony, and public input. If there is more to be done on this topic, whether it be through a change in existing rules or proposing new ones, it is our hope that today's collaboration will highlight those needs and lead to a solution that is in the public interest and keep us a leader among states.