



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
Federal Aviation  
Administration

# Advisory Circular

**Subject:** Safety Considerations in the Air  
Transportation of Persons With  
Disabilities

**Date:** DRAFT

**Initiated by:** AFS-200

**AC No:** 120-32A

**Change:**

- 1 PURPOSE OF THIS ADVISORY CIRCULAR (AC).** This AC provides information to crewmembers regarding the safe carriage of persons with disabilities who may require emergency evacuation assistance. Specifically, this AC provides information about, among other things, required safety briefings for persons with disabilities when they travel on airplanes, service animals, and seat location considerations for persons with mobility challenges. Further, this AC provides a hyperlink to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT) “Traveling With a Disability” Aviation Consumer Protection web page (see paragraph [12.3](#)), which provides disability training materials and other information regarding the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) and its implementing regulation, Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) Part [382](#), Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel. The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.
- 2 AUDIENCE.** Air carrier personnel involved in the development of aircraft standard operating procedures (SOP) and training programs as well as crewmembers, Complaint Resolution Officials (CRO), and others involved in flight operations under 14 CFR parts [121](#) and [135](#) should be familiar with the contents of this AC.
- 3 WHERE YOU CAN FIND THIS AC.** You can find this AC on the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) website at [https://www.faa.gov/regulations\\_policies/advisory\\_circulars](https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/advisory_circulars) and the Dynamic Regulatory System (DRS) at <https://drs.faa.gov>.
- 4 WHAT THIS AC CANCELS.** AC 120-32, Air Transportation of Handicapped Persons, dated March 25, 1977, is canceled.
- 5 DEFINITIONS.** For the purposes of this AC, the terms listed in this section have the following meanings:
  - 5.1 Assistive Device.** Any piece of equipment that assists a passenger with a disability in carrying out a major life activity. Such devices are intended to assist a passenger with a disability to hear, see, communicate, maneuver, or perform other functions of daily life and may include medical devices and medications.
  - 5.2 Child Restraint System (CRS).** A CRS is a hard-backed safety seat approved by the government for use in both motor vehicles and aircraft. The FAA controls the approval of

some but not all CRSs. In addition to a solid back and seat, a CRS should have internal restraint straps installed to securely hold the child to the CRS; a label stating that the FAA, a foreign government, or the United Nations (UN) has approved it for aviation use; and instructions on the label that the user must follow.

- 5.3 Complaint Resolution Official (CRO).** An air carrier employee trained in the requirements of part 382 who is available at each airport served during all times operations occur. They are intended as the operator’s “expert” in compliance with part 382. The CRO is not required to be given authority to countermand a decision of the pilot in command (PIC) of an aircraft based on safety.
- 5.4 Direct Threat.** A significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a modification of policies, practices, or procedures or by the provision of auxiliary aids or services.
- 5.5 Exit Seat.** Each seat with direct access to an exit door of the aircraft. Exit seats include each seat in a row of seats through which passengers would have to pass to gain access to an exit, from the first seat inboard of the exit to the first aisle inboard of the exit.
- 5.6 Individual With a Disability.** Any individual who has a physical or mental impairment that, on a permanent or temporary basis, substantially limits one or more major life activity; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.
- 5.7 Major Life Activities.** Functions such as caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.
- 5.8 Orthotic Positioning Device (OPD).** A device or supportive brace equipped with internal restraints designed and used to help support and position a person upright in an aircraft seat.
- 5.9 Physical or Mental Impairment.** Includes, but is not limited to, such diseases and conditions as orthopedic, visual, speech, and hearing impairments; cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, intellectual disability, emotional illness, drug addiction, and alcoholism.
- 5.10 Portable Oxygen Concentrator (POC).** A portable medical device that separates oxygen from other gases in ambient air and dispenses this concentrated oxygen to the user. All POCs accepted for use on board aircraft must meet certain acceptance criteria and bear a label indicating conformance with the acceptance criteria.
- 5.11 Safety Assistant/Attendant.** A person required by a certificate holder (CH) to accompany a passenger with disabilities. Specific circumstances that typically require a safety assistant/attendant include a passenger who is:

- Traveling on a stretcher or in an incubator (where such service is offered);
- Mentally challenged and unable to comprehend or respond appropriately to safety instructions;
- Severely impaired with respect to mobility and unable to assist in their own evacuation from the aircraft; or
- Deaf and severely impaired with respect to vision such that they could not adequately communicate with crewmembers to permit transmission of the safety briefing.

**5.11.1** If the safety assistant/attendant is accompanying a passenger traveling on a stretcher or in an incubator, the safety assistant/attendant must be capable of attending to the passenger’s in-flight medical needs. The main role of the safety assistant/attendant is to assist in an emergency evacuation. However, the safety assistant/attendant can provide assistance in eating, assistance within the lavatory, or provision of medical services.

**5.12 Service Animal.** As amended in 2020, part 382 defines a service animal as only a dog, regardless of breed or type, that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a qualified individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Animal species other than dogs, emotional support animals, comfort animals, companionship animals, and service animals in training are not service animals for the purposes of this AC.

**5.13 Service Animal Handler.** A passenger in air transportation who is a qualified individual with a disability who receives assistance from a service animal that does work or performs tasks that are directly related to the individual’s disability, or a third party who accompanies the individual with a disability traveling with a service animal, such as a parent of a minor child or a caregiver. The service animal handler is responsible for keeping the animal under control at all times and caring for and supervising the service animal, which includes toileting and feeding.

**6 BACKGROUND.** Originally, the FAA developed this AC to address public comments received in response to Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) 73-16 (38 FR 14757) and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) 74-25 (39 FR 24667), comments made at six public hearings conducted throughout the United States, and the results of tests conducted at the FAA’s Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI). When originally published, this AC served to inform parts 121 and 135 CHs of the then-updated rules for the safe carriage of persons who may require the assistance of another person during an emergency evacuation. This updated AC discusses how to properly and lawfully consider aircraft and passenger safety when providing transportation to passengers with disabilities.

**7 TYPES OF DISABILITIES.** Passengers with disabilities have different needs, and injury can result if a flight attendant (F/A) improperly assists a person with a disability. As required by part 121, § [121.571\(a\)\(3\)\(i\) and \(ii\)](#) and part 135, § [135.117\(b\)](#), crewmembers must ask the person with disabilities and their safety assistant/attendant, if any, as to the most appropriate manner of providing assistance so as to prevent pain and further injury.

- 7.1 Aging.** Hearing impairment and a loss of agility are the most common ailments with elderly individuals. The higher noise level in airplanes may cause little or no difficulty for persons with normal hearing but can make communication with elderly passengers more difficult. To compensate for hearing issues, F/As should face the passenger and speak somewhat slower and louder than normal. If necessary, use the safety information card to provide visual cues regarding the required safety briefing.
- 7.2 Casted or Splinted Arms or Legs or Artificial Limbs.** A passenger with an arm or leg in a cast or splint may need to prop the cast up as much as possible to keep swelling and discomfort to a minimum. A person with a leg cast may be unable to bend the casted or splinted leg, so when propping the leg, F/As must ensure clear access to the aircraft aisle during taxi, takeoff, and landing for all passengers seated in that row (§§ [121.589](#) and [135.87](#)). It is suggested that a passenger occupies a seat on the same side of the aircraft as the side of the arm or leg in a cast, splint, or brace or on the same side of an artificial limb so that they can readily move to their stronger side in case of emergency evacuation.
- 7.3 Hearing Impairment.** Passengers with hearing impairment may be unknown to crewmembers during a flight, but challenges exist for passengers with hearing impairment, such as not hearing required safety announcements during boarding or pretakeoff briefings; not knowing where briefing cards are located; not being able to hear “fasten seatbelt” announcements; not knowing of delays or diversion to alternate airports; and, most important, not being able to hear evacuation instructions, often given in darkness with loss of electrical power or dense smoke, which would impair the use of eyesight for exiting directions. Sections 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b) require F/As to conduct an individual briefing before each takeoff; therefore, when a passenger with hearing impairment identifies themselves to a crewmember, it is important to identify a communication method to ensure important information can be transmitted. Communication methods include sign language, written instructions, written answers to questions, and lip reading.
- 7.4 Laryngectomy.** F/As should be prepared to utilize alternate means of communication, such as a writing pad or electronic tablet, if a passenger uses a voice prosthesis or artificial larynx (electrolarynx) to transmit speechlike sound.
- 7.5 Movement Disorders.** Persons with movement disorders lack, to some extent, muscular control, resulting in clumsiness, instability, imbalance, involuntary muscle spasms, shaking or trembling, or facial tics. Sometimes such disabilities result in slurred speech, a staggering gait, or other slight signs of motor difficulties and can be misconstrued as being associated with intoxication.
- 7.5.1** F/As may need to use alternate means of communication to accomplish the individual briefing required by §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b).
- 7.5.2** Persons with movement disorders may require the use of an OPD in order to remain seated upright in an aircraft seat. The passenger’s primary restraint is the aircraft seatbelt,

secured around both the user and the OPD. Per 14 CFR part [25](#), § [25.562\(b\)](#), an OPD must not attach to the aircraft seat; it only provides support and not restraint.

- 7.6 Paralysis.** Paralysis (or plegia) is a temporary or permanent loss of voluntary muscle movement and sensation in a body part, such as the arms, legs, or both. Persons with paralysis may not be able to feel pain or touch or distinguish hot or cold. Because there is no warning signal of pain, F/As should be sensitive to this when assisting them during boarding and deplaning and when handling hot beverages and foods.
- 7.6.1** Quadriplegia is paralysis that extends from neck to shoulder level down, involving the arms and legs. Quadraplegics will almost always travel with a safety assistant/attendant.
- 7.6.2** Paraplegia is paralysis from the waist down, involving the legs. Paraplegics can usually travel alone.
- 7.6.3** Hemiplegia is the paralysis of one side of the body, often caused by a stroke. In addition to paralysis, their sense of balance may be impaired, and there may be a tendency to become easily confused. Hemiplegics may also have great difficulty in finding words to express themselves, may have slurred speech, and may have trouble understanding and remembering what is said to them. Hemiplegics may not be able to see things on their paralyzed side. It is safest for them to move toward their normal or strong side. For example, persons with a normal or strong left side should be seated on the right side of the aircraft so that they can readily move to their left in case of emergency evacuation. The opposite would apply to persons with a strong right side.
- 7.7 Vision Impairment.** Even if it appears that a passenger with vision impairment does not require assistance, §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b) require F/As to conduct an individual briefing before each takeoff. Before providing this briefing, and if it is available, ask the passenger with vision impairment if a briefing card written in braille would be beneficial. F/As should include in the required individual briefing information about partitions and closets that may be between the passenger’s seat and the appropriate exits. F/As should offer to let a passenger with vision impairment touch oxygen masks and life jackets for familiarization.
- 7.7.1 Vision Impairment Assistive Devices.** Persons with vision impairment generally employ one of two methods for independent travel. Some use canes, often made of aluminum or fiberglass and painted white with a red tip, while others use a service animal. Both techniques enable the user to travel with little or no assistance.
- 7.7.1.1 Canes.** Canes can fold (telescoping or collapsing) or be rigid. The folding types do not present a problem during flight or emergency egress since they can fold and fit into one’s pocket. A rigid cane, normally 4½ to 5 feet in length, does not fold and must be stowed in accordance with § 121.589(g).
- 7.7.1.2 Service Animals.** Should it become necessary to evacuate the aircraft, the passenger with vision impairment, if accompanied by a service animal, would go down the evacuation slide with the dog in their lap. It is the service animal handler’s responsibility to ensure the dog is wearing its harness so that the

team can exit the area quickly once each are on the ground. The harness also helps to activate the dog’s sense of responsibility and assurance. If a service animal and its handler become separated in the course of evacuation and the dog remains in the aircraft, the dog should be led by its leash to the emergency exit. A responsible person or crewmember can be assigned to accompany the dog down the slide and assist in reuniting the dog with its handler once each are on the ground.

## **8 SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS.**

**8.1 Required Briefing.** Before each takeoff, §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b) require F/As to conduct an individual briefing of each passenger who may need the assistance of another passenger to move expeditiously to an exit in the event of an emergency. The briefing must contain information about the procedures to be followed if an evacuation occurs, including information about the routes to each appropriate exit and on the most appropriate time to begin moving to an exit in the event of an emergency. Additionally, this briefing requires F/As to inquire of the passenger with disabilities and, if applicable, their safety assistant/attendant as to the most appropriate manner of assisting the passenger so as to prevent pain and further injury.

**8.2 Stowage of Equipment.** Qualified individuals with a disability are permitted to bring certain assistive devices into the aircraft cabin provided they can be stowed in designated storage areas, such as overhead compartments or under seats, consistent with Federal requirements concerning security, safety, and hazardous materials (HAZMAT). Assistive devices permitted to be brought into the aircraft cabin include manual wheelchairs (folding or collapsible), mobility aids (e.g., canes, crutches, or walkers), and devices for use within the cabin (e.g., prescription medications, vision-enhancing devices, or POCs). If an approved stowage area is not available in the cabin or the items cannot be transported in the cabin consistent with Federal requirements concerning security, safety, and HAZMAT, wheelchairs, other mobility aids, or other assistive devices must be stowed in the baggage compartment. Reasons an assistive device would be stowed in the cargo area as checked baggage include:

- The device is too large to fit in the designated area;
- The device cannot be stowed safely in close proximity to the owner; or
- An assistive device is already occupying a designated area.

**8.2.1 Collapsible or Folding Wheelchair.** Individuals with a collapsible or break-down wheelchair may stow their device or its parts (e.g., wheels or seat) in overhead compartments, under seats, or in the designated wheelchair stowage area if the device fits and is in accordance with the FAA safety regulations. Per part 382, § [382.67\(a\)](#), aircraft with 100 or more seats must have priority space for storing a passenger’s folding wheelchair in the cabin. This space is granted on a first-come-first-served basis. Airlines are allowed to choose between stowing wheelchairs in a closet or other priority space in the cabin compartment and strapping them to a row of seats. Per § 382.67(b), if the airline chooses to use the seat-strapping method to stow a wheelchair, it must transport



two wheelchairs in the cabin if requested unless the second wheelchair would displace other passengers.

- 8.2.2 Flexible Travel Cane.** Generally, flexible travel canes used by individuals with vision impairment may be stowed under any series of connected passenger seats in the same row if the cane does not protrude into an aisle and is flat on the floor; between a nonemergency exit window seat and the fuselage if the cane is flat on the floor; or beneath any two nonemergency exit window seats if the cane is flat on the floor (refer to § 121.589).
- 8.2.3 POC.** During movement on the surface, takeoff, and landing, the POC must be stowed under the seat in front of the user or in another approved stowage location so that it does not block the aisle way or the entryway to the row. If the device is to be operated by the user, it must be operated only at a seat location that does not restrict any passenger’s access to, or use of, any required emergency or regular exit, or the aisle(s) in the passenger compartment. No person operating a POC is permitted to occupy an exit seat (refer to §§ [121.574](#) and [135.91](#)).
- 8.2.4 Battery-Powered Wheelchair or Other Mobility Aid When Carried as Checked Baggage.** Battery-powered wheelchairs, other mobility aids, their batteries, and spare batteries must be stowed consistent with safety, security, and HAZMAT rules (refer to Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (49 CFR) part [175](#), § [175.10](#) and 14 CFR § [382.121](#)). Due to their size and potential issues concerning their power sources, battery-powered wheelchairs and other mobility aids are not required to be transported in the cabin; however, per 49 CFR § 175.10(a)(15), when carried as checked baggage, a wheelchair or other battery-powered mobility aid must be equipped with a nonspillable battery or a dry sealed battery and handled in accordance with Federal requirements. Additionally, 49 CFR § 175.10(a)(16) permits a wheelchair or other battery-powered mobility aid equipped with a spillable battery to be carried as checked baggage if certain conditions are met. Further, 49 CFR § 175.10(a)(17) permits the carriage of a wheelchair or other mobility aid equipped with a lithium ion battery as checked baggage provided certain criteria are met. One spare nonspillable or dry sealed battery may be carried per passenger if handled in accordance with Federal requirements.
- 8.3 CRS Use by Passengers With Disabilities.** The majority of individuals using CRS on aircraft are young children typically weighing 40 pounds or less. However, there are some people who, because of disabilities, need the support and security that a CRS provides in order to travel safely on aircraft. Persons who have not reached their 18th birthday may use an FAA-approved CRS that is appropriate for that child’s size and weight. Under such circumstances, air carriers may not prohibit the use of the CRS. There are several companies that manufacture CRSs approved for use on aircraft specifically designed for larger children with disabilities.
- 8.3.1 CRS Use by Adults With Disabilities.** In the case of an adult (a person 18 years or older) who, because of disabilities, needs the support and security that a restraint system provides in order to travel safely on aircraft, the individual or the air carrier (on the

individual’s behalf) must request an exemption to certain operating rules addressing the use of the CRS on the aircraft.

- 8.3.2** Use of Nonapproved CRS for a Child or an Adult With Disabilities. In the case of a person who, because of physical challenges, needs the support and security of a nonapproved CRS or restraint system, the individual, their guardian, or the aircraft operator (on the individual’s behalf) may request an exemption to certain operating rules addressing the use of the CRS on the aircraft.
- 8.3.3** CRS Exemptions. Upon receipt of an exemption request, the FAA will consider the merits of the exemption request in order to determine whether to grant the requested relief, which could include the use of a nonapproved CRS during all phases of flight. If granted, conditions and limitations of the grant could include specific requirements with which the individual or their parent/caregiver must comply when the relief is exercised. These requirements may include advising the air carrier about the contents of the exemption at least 48 hours before the date of each flight, having a copy of the grant of exemption available for the aircraft operator to review, and specifying the aircraft seat location in which the CRS is used.
- 8.4** **OPD.** An OPD is a device or supportive brace equipped with internal restraints, designed and used to help support and position a person upright in an aircraft seat. The passenger with disabilities occupies the OPD, and the user and the OPD occupy an aircraft seat. The aircraft seatbelt, secured around the user and the OPD, is used as the primary restraint. Per § 25.562, an OPD must not attach to the aircraft seat; it only provides support and not restraint.
- 8.5** **Emergency Evacuations.** CAMI tests revealed that persons who used assistive devices to evacuate an aircraft increased their time in reaching the exit. Not only does trying to locate, unstrap, and untangle the assistive devices from where they are stowed (under the seat or in an overhead bin) waste time, but the narrow aisle reduces the maximum benefit of their use for the passenger. Thus, passengers with disabilities who use assistive devices would not use them during emergency evacuation, and this should be communicated to the passenger during the individual briefing required by §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b).
- 8.5.1** Persons with movement disorders may require the use of an OPD in order to remain seated upright in an aircraft seat. The passenger’s primary restraint is the aircraft seatbelt secured around both the user and the OPD. An OPD must not attach to the aircraft seat; it only provides support and not restraint. During an evacuation, F/As should instruct the person using an OPD or their caregiver to release the FAA-approved seatbelt and the OPD before evacuating.
- 8.5.2** Folding canes used by a passenger with vision impairment typically would not present a problem during an emergency evacuation since they can fold and fit into one’s pocket, and it would help the passenger with vision impairment when leaving the vicinity after they have evacuated the aircraft. However, rigid canes, which are normally 4½ to 5 feet in length, are not necessary for a passenger with vision impairment to use in the



evacuation of an aircraft as they would use the backs of seats for guidance or follow passengers. Additionally, the possibility of the rigid cane damaging the slide and hindering the evacuation does not warrant the passenger with vision impairment keeping their rigid cane with them at their seat; therefore, the rigid cane should remain stowed in accordance with § 121.589(g).

## 9 REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS.

**9.1 Part 382.** Part 382 does not require or authorize F/As to disregard FAA safety regulations. Where different treatment of passengers with disabilities or other restrictions is mandated by an FAA safety regulation, airlines must, in accordance with § [382.87](#), not exclude any passenger with a disability from any seat or require that a passenger with a disability sit in any particular seat based on their disability. However, in responding to requests from individuals for seating accommodations, carriers shall comply with FAA safety rules, including those pertaining to all seating. Air carriers are not required to furnish more than one seat per ticket or provide a seat in a class of service other than the one the passenger purchased.

**9.2 Exit Row Seating.** If an FAA regulation provides that only persons who can perform certain functions can sit in an emergency exit seat, then F/As can request an individual unable to perform those functions (regardless of whether that individual has a disability) to sit in another row. If the passenger refuses, F/As can properly deny transportation to such a passenger because FAA regulations establish criteria that must be met in order for a passenger to occupy a seat in an emergency exit row (refer to §§ [121.585](#) and [135.129](#)). If a passenger with a disability meets these FAA criteria, they must be allowed to sit in an emergency exit seat. As with any other passenger, F/As must look at the individual passenger with a disability and reasonably assess whether they meet FAA criteria for exit row seating. Not all disability-related limitations prevent people from performing the required exit row functions. Per § 382.87, an airline must not exclude any qualified individual with a disability from any seat in an exit row or other location if the individual can perform the necessary functions of sitting in the seat in accordance with FAA regulations.

**9.3 Aircraft Configuration.** The following features are required for aircraft ordered by the carrier after April 5, 1990, or delivered to the carrier after April 5, 1992.

- 9.3.1** Per § [382.61](#), aircraft with 30 or more passenger seats must have movable aisle armrests on at least half of the aisle seats where it is feasible and it does not interfere with safety.
- 9.3.2** Per § [382.63](#), aircraft with more than one aisle in which lavatories are provided must include at least one lavatory accessible to passengers with a disability accessing the lavatory with an onboard wheelchair.
- 9.3.3** Per § [382.65](#), aircraft with more than 60 passenger seats and an accessible lavatory must be equipped with an onboard wheelchair.
- 9.3.4** Per § 382.67, aircraft with 100 or more passenger seats must have priority storage space within the cabin to stow at least one passenger's folding wheelchair.

**9.4 Safety Briefings.** Before each takeoff, §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b) require F/As to conduct an individual briefing of each person who may need the assistance of another person to move expeditiously to an exit in the event of an emergency. The individual briefing must contain information about the procedures to be followed if an evacuation occurs, including information about the routes to each appropriate exit and on the most appropriate time to begin moving to an exit in the event of an emergency. Additionally, this individual briefing requires F/As to inquire of the passenger with disabilities and if applicable, their safety assistant/attendant, as to the most appropriate manner of assisting the person so as to prevent pain and further injury.

**9.5 CRO.** In accordance with the ACAA, air carriers must make available a CRO at the airport (in person or by telephone or Teletype (TTY)) to address disability-related complaints that arise during the travel process at all times when that air carrier’s flights are operating at that airport.

**9.6 Denial.** If an air carrier has established procedures (including reasonable notice requirements) for the carriage of passengers who may need the assistance of another person to move expeditiously to an exit in the event of an emergency, and either 1) the passenger fails to comply with the notice requirements, or 2) the passenger cannot be carried in accordance with the procedures, the carrier may refuse transportation to a passenger on the basis that their transportation would or might be inimical to safety of flight (refer to § [121.586](#)).

## **10 SERVICE ANIMALS.**

**10.1 Acceptance.** Per § [382.72](#), F/As must allow service animals to accompany passengers with disabilities in the cabin consistent with FAA regulations. Service animals should not be touched or petted, and F/As should discourage other passengers, including children, from distracting the dog from its task.

**10.2 Location and Placement of Service Animals.** Per § [382.77](#), crewmembers must allow the service animal to sit in close proximity to its handler as long as the service animal does not block a space that must remain unobstructed for safety reasons, such as an aisle or access to an emergency exit, which would be a violation of FAA safety regulations. Often this will mean that the service animal will sit under the seat in front of the passenger with disabilities to avoid obstructing an aisle or other space. Some service animals are held in the arms of their users, much like an adult would hold a human infant (limited to infants under two years of age) of roughly the same size. The service animal should remain with its handler throughout the flight. The passenger with disabilities and the service animal should be seated in a section aft of a bulkhead or divider if there is more room for the service animal. A window seat is also recommended, but not required, so that other passengers will not be required to step over the service animal to reach the aisle.

**11 EVACUATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR PASSENGERS WITH DISABILITIES.** FAA’s CAMI has conducted research to determine where passengers with disabilities should be seated in aircraft operated under parts 121 and 135 so that, in the event of an

emergency evacuation, they can leave the aircraft, either unassisted or assisted, by the safest and most expedient route while not slowing the evacuation.

**11.1 Nonambulatory.** The main role of a safety assistant/attendant is to assist in an emergency evacuation. Evacuation tests conducted by CAMI revealed that due to the narrow aisle width, an accompanying safety assistant/attendant trying to lift a passenger with disabilities seated in an aisle seat would temporarily block the aisle and hinder other passengers attempting to evacuate. Once the main stream of evacuating passengers has passed, the safety assistant/attendant and the passenger with disabilities can normally catch up to the flow since there is a bunching at the exit. Two nonambulatory passengers with disabilities traveling with safety assistants/attendants should not be seated directly across the aisle from each other because their safety assistants/attendants would interfere with each other while attempting to remove the nonambulatory passengers with disabilities from their seats. Information about the routes to each appropriate exit and on the most appropriate time to begin moving to an exit in the event of an emergency and an inquiry of the passenger with disabilities and their safety assistant/attendant as to the most appropriate manner of assisting the passenger so as to prevent pain and further injury should be communicated during the briefing required by §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b).

**11.2 Ambulatory.** A passenger with disabilities who is ambulatory should be seated in an area in which evacuation would normally occur through a floor-level, nonoverwing exit. Information about the routes to each appropriate exit and the most appropriate time to begin moving to an exit in the event of an emergency and an inquiry of the passenger with disabilities as to the most appropriate manner of assisting the passenger so as to prevent pain and further injury should be communicated during the briefing required by §§ 121.571(a)(3)(i) and (ii) and 135.117(b).

## **12 RESOURCES.**

### **12.1 DOT Final Rules and Regulations:**

- Part [382](#), Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel.
- Traveling by Air With Service Animals ([85 FR 79742](#)).
- Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel; Accessibility of Aircraft and Stowage of Wheelchairs ([78 FR 67918](#)).

### **12.2 FAA Final Rules:**

- Exit Row Seating ([55 FR 8054](#)).
- Acceptance Criteria for Portable Oxygen Concentrators Used On Board Aircraft ([81 FR 33097](#)).
- Carry-On Baggage—Flexible Travel Canes ([46 FR 38048](#)).

**12.3 DOT Guidance Materials:**

- Traveling With a Disability: <https://www.transportation.gov/individuals/aviation-consumer-protection/traveling-disability>.
- Guidance Concerning Air Travelers With Developmental Disabilities: <https://www.transportation.gov/airconsumer/guidance-developmental-disabilities>.
- Disability Training Materials and Helpful Information: <https://www.transportation.gov/individuals/aviation-consumer-protection/disability-training-materials-and-helpful-information-0>.

**12.4 FAA Guidance Materials:**

- AC [120-87](#), Use of Child Restraint Systems on Aircraft.
- FAA Order 8900.1, Volume 3, Chapter 33, Section 6, Paragraph 3-3577, Use of Orthotic Positioning Devices (OPD) by People With Disabilities in Aircraft Seats.

**13 AC FEEDBACK FORM.** For your convenience, the AC Feedback Form is the last page of this AC. Note any deficiencies found, clarifications needed, or suggested improvements regarding the contents of this AC on the Feedback Form.

Lawrence Fields  
Acting Executive Director, Flight Standards Service