

Inquiry into *Airline Passenger Protections (Pay on Delay) Bill 2024* Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

Justice and Equity Centre Opening Statement, 17 March 2025

We thank the Committee for the invitation to appear today.

The Justice and Equity Centre has extensive experience working in public policy development and advocacy promoting the rights and equal participation of people with disability, including the right to access air travel. We do this work in collaboration with disability advocates.

The Bill highlights the importance of protecting air travellers in this country, but with more than one in five Australians having a disability, any reform in this area must directly consider the experiences of people with disability when flying by air.

As we outlined in our submission, we regularly hear from people with disability about the barriers they face at all stages of air travel. Where airlines or airports deliver their services in ways that are inaccessible, or fail to deliver services at all, people with disability are disproportionately impacted and experience serious consequences and harm.

The range and severity of the issues experienced by people with disability show that existing legal and regulatory systems are not working.

There is a great need for robust consumer protections in air travel to benefit *all* consumers. But the only way a consumer protection scheme can meet the needs of people with disability is by designing those systems *with* people with disability. While the Bill proposes consultation, it should specifically require consultation with people with disability and their representative organisations.

Additionally, the obligations the Bill mandates to be prescribed in rules need to be broader to cover the entire customer experience. In particular:

- the Bill should mandate that the rules make provision for a carrier's obligation to properly handle mobility devices, and provide remedies for any damage; and
- it should consider the obligations of airports, which may share responsibility for ensuring the availability of equipment and facilities and delivering customer assistance through the airport.

Our submission also reinforces that consumer protections are not enough to ensure people with disability have equal access to air travel – disability-specific standards and regulatory reforms are critical to ensure airlines and airports make their services accessible and inclusive. Consumer protections need to be complementary to and compatible with these reforms.