

CHERYL C. KAGAN  
Legislative District 17  
Montgomery County

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Vice Chair  
Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee

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Joint Audit Committee  
Joint Committee on Federal Relations



Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Suite 2 West  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
301-858-3134 · 410-841-3134  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3134  
Fax 301-858-3665 · 410-841-3665  
Cheryl.Kagan@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**SB402: Health Care Practitioners – Telehealth**  
**Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**  
**Hearing: Thursday, February 13, 2020, at 1:00pm**

Many Marylanders lack access to consistent, timely medical care. A relatively new component of health care delivery, telehealth, holds promise to make many health care services deliverable virtually, reducing the time it takes to get care and expanding care to rural residents. But state laws need some adjustments to ensure telehealth service delivery can expand. This issue arose from the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR). The Maryland Board of Physicians proposed regulations that did not match the legislature’s intent and SB402 seeks to address those concerns.

SB402 creates a consistent regulatory framework in Maryland for telehealth across all health care professions, authorizing the use of both synchronous technology -- which means two-way “real-time” online communication like a chat -- and asynchronous technology -- one-way electronic messaging. The bill also addresses some barriers created by the current Board of Physician regulations, which restrict the use of asynchronous technology in some circumstances.

Telehealth will increase access to medical advice and services for people. People in remote, rural and underserved areas do not have equal, consistent, or timely access to medical care. Telehealth can reduce the need for emergency room visits. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been an early adopter of telehealth, and it has helped them reach thousands of more veterans. Now, about 12% of the VA’s services are delivered through telehealth.

Health care consumers can connect with a professional without leaving their homes. This is especially helpful for patients who cannot get an appointment during normal business hours; those without transportation; and patients who would have to arrange childcare services.

As consumers rely on high deductible plans, they are demanding more efficiency with their health care dollars. According to The American Journal of Emergency Medicine, “telemedicine consults result in short-term cost savings by diverting patients from a more expensive care setting.” Telehealth reduces the number of hospital admissions and bed days. This will lead to lower costs and a huge increase in care quality and patient satisfaction.

I strongly urge a favorable report of SB402.