

Hearing Date: February 16, 2021

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Bill: SB 568- Health Care Practitioners – Telehealth – Out of state health care providers

Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

This letter is in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT of SB 568** regarding health care providers' ability to provide telehealth services out of state. The recent COVID pandemic highlighted the importance of telehealth services in assisting patients with accessing health care. Telehealth enabled existing medical relationships to continue and new ones to be established while protecting the health of patients and providers alike. However, the speed at which these changes had to occur under the state of emergency created several areas of confusion. Having out of state providers register with Maryland will help, but there needs to be further clarification about the physical location of the provider and if there is a physical location that the clinical services are located in relation to the person receiving the telehealth service.

I am a licensed physician assistant (PA) in both Maryland and Pennsylvania. I work part time providing outpatient psychiatric services for a community mental health agency and a small college in Pennsylvania, though my home address is in Maryland. When the pandemic hit, the college sent the students home, many of whom reside in Maryland. Additionally, many of my community mental health clinic patients are also Maryland residents. There was immediate confusion as to whether or not I could provide care to these patients since they were now living in a different state from where their services were supposed to be originating, even though they technically were still in the same state as myself. To further confuse things, my supervising physician lives in Pennsylvania and does not have a Maryland license. We were very concerned about abandoning our patients while continuing to follow the law. Conversations with colleagues, the state, and even our malpractice insurance carrier did not result in a consistent, definitive answer. While the state of emergency declared by both Pennsylvania and Maryland likely covered care for the interim, once the emergency order is lifted, if the students do not return to college in person, we will not be able to serve them, even though they will be paying the same student fees that would entitle them to psychiatric services. Similarly, those patients who are unable or unwilling to come in-person to the community mental health clinic will

also be asked to transfer to a new psychiatric provider. This bill would help significantly with this level of confusion, though further explanation needs to be had regarding the physical location of the provider versus the origination of the clinical services, and both these questions in relation to the patient's physical location. I look forward to continuing to serve my patients through telehealth platforms, both video and audio only, and I feel that it has enabled me to reach individuals who would have otherwise been very limited in their ability to receive care.

Thank you for the consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deanna Bridge Najera". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Deanna" being more prominent.

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