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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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SB278: State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health - Maryland School-Based Health Center Standards - Telehealth (EMERGENCY BILL)

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Wednesday, January 20, 2021, 3pm

COVID-19 has created numerous obstacles for Marylanders, especially with regard to health care accessibility. In the last legislative session, the General Assembly enacted (and Governor Hogan signed) emergency bill [SB402/HB448](#), which permitted telehealth services. This option has been vital during the pandemic to provide patient care while still maintaining social distancing.

Prior to the Coronavirus, Maryland's 86 school-based health centers (SBHCs) provided students and their families from low-income and rural areas with essential health care, and behavioral health and dental services at some locations. Roughly 18 of the 86 SBHCs are currently offering telehealth services.

Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) telehealth application and approval requirements create an unnecessary barrier to care. On June 3, 2020, I sent a letter to the MSDE Superintendent, detailing the need for access to telehealth services in our SBHCs. The letter urged her to remove the misguided requirement for an in-person visit prior to authorizing telehealth appointments. Instead of taking action, Superintendent Salmon inaccurately claimed that local superintendents could address the issue independently. In November 2020, four SBHCs requested access to telehealth from MSDE; as of today, MSDE has not yet granted permission.

[SB278](#) would eliminate the restrictions so that SBHCs can practice telehealth. This would allow students and their families to get continuity of care regardless of access to transportation; time-off from work; child care; or other barriers related to COVID-19. **Telehealth results in [better health outcomes](#), fewer disparities, and lower costs.**

Telehealth through our 86 SBHCs is a critical component of our COVID-19 health care response; that's why these centers are included in [MSDE's recovery plan](#). If SBHCs were able to [utilize telehealth](#), it would improve students' health and educational engagement and reduce the burden on parents to find health care during the pandemic.

I urge a favorable report of emergency bill SB278.