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February 17, 2021

The Honorable Senator Delores Kelley, Chairperson
Finance Committee
Maryland Senate
11 Bladen Street
Room 3, East Wing
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **SUPPORT FOR SB 567 - Telehealth Services - Expansion**

Dear Chairperson Kelley and Distinguished Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I want to thank you for taking my written statement of support for SB 567 on telehealth reimbursement to be entered into the public hearing record. My name is Ellen Dumer, LCPC and I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who resides and practices in Harford County, Maryland.

Reimbursement for telebehavioral health modalities is important to me and to my clients as it provides easier access to services. This is especially true for clients who are elderly, disabled, without transportation, and those who have work or home responsibilities that impact their ability to take time out of their schedule for transportation to an appointment. It is widely known that mental health services have been limited by many factors over the past year, with COVID being the most frequent reason for increased anxiety and depression across all demographics. My inquiries from new clients for telehealth has increased significantly. The location of my practice is a factor as clients from neighboring states who would otherwise be able to travel prefer not to have in-person visits.

We are still in the throes of a global pandemic and the need for health care and mental health services has never been greater. COVID-19 has revealed systemic flaws in our mental health services for providers and clients alike. It is imperative that we remove barriers to life saving services in a responsible and urgent manner.

This bill will update what Maryland health care services the Medical Assistance Program is required to provide through telehealth by broadening the circumstances under which the Program is required to provide telehealth and telebehavioral health. It is critical to update current Maryland code to align with best practices in our field by requiring certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations to reimburse health care services provided through telehealth.

While we are working to upload and implement the Counseling Compact in this state and throughout the U.S., this immediate action, removing barriers to critical supports and supporting mental health providers by broadening reimbursements in Maryland, is essential for the wellbeing of residents, families, and a social services system overburdened by staggering need.

I strongly urge you to support SB 567.

Sincerely,