

JOSELINE A. PEÑA-MELNYK

Legislative District 21  
Prince George's and  
Anne Arundel Counties

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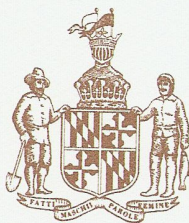
*Vice Chair*

Health and Government  
Operations Committee

*Subcommittees*

Government Operations and  
Long Term Care

Chair, Public Health and  
Minority Health Disparities



## *The Maryland House of Delegates*

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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### **House Bill 123 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021 (As Amended)**

#### **Testimony of Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk (Favorable)**

Chairman Pendergrass and fellow members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, I am pleased to present House Bill (HB) 123, which would preserve access to telehealth services.

Access to healthcare services has been a longstanding issue which has become even more significant with the pandemic. Maintaining and expanding access to care through telehealth would reduce barriers that exacerbate health disparities throughout Maryland.

HB 123, as amended, would maintain telehealth through:

1. Audio-only telehealth services which are crucial to reaching every demographic with health needs. We know that older adults and low-income families are less likely to have access to a smartphone, webcam, or broadband internet and therefore may not be able to have video telehealth meetings with providers. Over 300,000 Marylanders living in rural areas do not have access to consistent broadband internet. Audio-only services allow us to bridge that digital divide. These groups are also considered high-risk for COVID-19 and therefore need another option for accessing care.
2. Ensuring the continued availability of Maryland Medicaid recipients to receive telehealth care in the sites where they are located by applying for waivers and waiver changes from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Maryland Medicaid recipients have increased their telehealth use during the public health emergency, showing their willingness to be adaptable in receiving care. Telehealth consultations that allow patients to be in their homes are likely to expand access and offer the same or similar benefits as in-person care.
3. Requiring insurers to reimburse services rendered through telehealth modalities at a fair rate. Thus, providing safeguards for providers being unfairly compensated for their expertise.

We know that, even with the vaccine, social distancing will need to persist for months to come. By enacting HB 123 we would ensure continued relationships between patients and providers. All while preparing Maryland to face future crises that would require patients to interact with their providers virtually when it is not safe to do so in person.

We cannot take away methods of accessing care now and leave Marylanders without safe options. It is our obligation to ensure all residents have the ability to seek healthcare in a way that makes the most sense for them and their provider. Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 123. I respectfully request a favorable report.