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**HB 670 Maryland Health Care Commission - Study on Expansion of Interstate Telehealth
House Health and Government Operations Committee
FAVORABLE
February 10, 2022**

Good afternoon, Chair Pendergrass and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Jim Gutman, a Howard County resident and member of the Executive Council and lead health care advocacy volunteer for AARP Maryland. Before my retirement, for 25 years I edited, published and owned subscription regulatory and financial newsletters about U.S. health care. I also was a member, representing AARP Maryland, on the Maryland Health Care Commission's (MHCC) telehealth policy workgroup that helped develop a comprehensive report submitted to the General Assembly and Governor last year. Today, I am representing AARP Maryland and its 850,000 members in support of **House Bill 670 Maryland Health Care Commission-Study of Expansion of Interstate Telehealth**. We thank Delegates Wilkins and Charles for introducing it.

The extensive work of the telehealth workgroup and MHCC helped lead to Maryland enacting the Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021 (PTAA) to study the very important impact of telehealth usage, in the form of both audio-only and audio-visual technologies, on both somatic and behavioral health care. That good law requires MHCC, in consultation with state agencies, to make recommendations on telehealth coverage and payment levels relative to those for in-person care to your committee and the Senate Finance Committee by December 1 of this year. The work on this is well underway, including surveys of providers and interviews with consumers. The highly regarded National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago was selected after a competitive-bidding process to do some of the work.

But there is another important aspect of telehealth that drew a lot of deserved attention in the workgroup and needs more research. This relates to the expansion of telehealth to allow Maryland residents to receive health services from out-of-state practitioners when it is both desirable and necessary. The ongoing COVID pandemic has furnished ample illustrations of situations when access could be important.

The workgroup discussions showed there are a host of issues — some of them quite controversial — that merit detailed study. Even though the comprehensive PTAA-mandated study does cover some aspects of licensure, there are specific areas where an additional study is needed. These include complex issues such as how to address malpractice insurance as it relates to out-of-state providers, how to alter Maryland licensure requirements, and what effect an expansion of telehealth involving out-of-state providers would have on Maryland practitioners. Another big issue is the use of interstate compacts such as the Interstate Medical Licensure

Compact, which provides a hub where providers can apply for licensure in one place instead of having to apply separately in multiple states.

The new report is due December 1, 2023, one year after the PTAA-mandated study report. It will help the Maryland General Assembly make important decisions regarding telehealth that can improve access to care for all Maryland residents. Such access is especially important to the 50-and-over population AARP Maryland serves, but it also is vital to other residents of Maryland, especially in rural and urban areas where medical providers are often in short supply.

I have confidence that MHCC will do a thorough and objective job in this study, based on what I've seen serving on the telehealth policy workgroup and an earlier MHCC workgroup related to expansion of the e-prescribing database.

For all these reasons, AARP Maryland requests that the House Health and Government Operations Committee give a favorable report to HB 670. Thanks very much for your time and consideration. If you have questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling her at 410-302-8451.