


In Support of SB 372 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025

I am writing in support of SB 372 as a citizen of Maryland and licensed social worker. Telehealth improves access to care and allows service users more options for accessing care based on their individual circumstances. Importantly, many people benefit from telephonic contacts in addition to live audio/video through telehealth platforms. I began my social work career in Baltimore City as a Multisystemic Therapist (MST) in 2011 and later joined Functional Family Therapy (FFT) in 2012 for Department of Juveniles Services involved families. Both programs use telephonic contacts with youth and caregivers to coach caregivers and youth through challenges in addition to in-person services. Other research-informed programs like Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) also use phone-based coaching as part of standard care. Telephonic practice can provide immediate support to people who may not have access to broadband internet, technology, or digital literacy skills for live audio/video. When I transitioned to outpatient mental health care, in 2014 I spent over 2 hours on the phone to de-escalate an adult with active suicidal ideation. I successfully supported the client without a costly hospitalization; however, Medicaid refused reimbursement due to the service being telephonic. The emergency orders to authorize telehealth including telephonic care were an appropriate approach to the COVID pandemic. Following the temporary authorizations for telehealth, I began providing mental health therapy to older adults referred by primary care providers through a major health system in Maryland from October 2022 through December 2023. During that time, all mental health services were provided through telehealth. Every older adult I served was offered the choice between telephonic and live audio/video. Every single older adult selected telephonic as their modality of choice for engaging in mental health therapy, and clients demonstrated improved mental wellness. In summary, I have personally witnessed the importance of telephonic therapy to provide access to clients from adolescence to older adulthood. In particular, many older adults are more comfortable using phones with providers. Preserving telehealth services is important for ensuring Marylanders have access to critical mental health care when in-person care is impractical or unfeasible. Thank you for your time and commitment to all Maryland residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Everett Smith Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Everett Smith Jr.