



February 12, 2020

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Cmte.
Maryland General Assembly
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Health and Government Operations Cmte.
Maryland General Assembly
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB 402 / HB 448 and the use of telehealth

Dear Chairs Pinsky and Pendergrass and Committee Members

I am writing to voice our support for Senate Bill 402 (Kagan, Lam) and House Bill 448 (Rosenberg) as you take up the issue of telehealth. The bill's language regarding allowable technology in telehealth will allow the state of Maryland to maximize expanded access to healthcare for people with disabilities through telehealth. United Spinal Association supports public policies that promote and improve the quality of life for individuals with spinal cord injuries and other paralyzing conditions.

United Spinal Association is the largest non-profit organization, founded by paralyzed veterans, dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of all people living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), including veterans, and providing support and information to loved ones, care providers and professionals. United Spinal has over 70 years of experience educating and empowering almost 2.5 million individuals with SCI/D to achieve and maintain the highest levels of independence, health and personal fulfillment. United Spinal has over 50,000 members, over 50 chapters, close to 200 support groups and more than 100 rehabilitation facilities and hospital partners nationwide including 10 distinguished Spinal Cord Injury Model System Centers that support innovative projects and research in the field of SCI. United Spinal Association is also a VA-accredited veterans service organization (VSO) serving veterans with disabilities of all kinds.

United Spinal Association respectfully requests the Committee pass SB 402 and HB 448 to allow the use of telecommunications technologies, both in synchronous and asynchronous telehealth interactions, in establishing the practitioner-patient relationship. Any requirement for audio-visual connections in establishing this relationship would create a barrier to access and removes another avenue for individuals with disabilities to obtain qualified physician access via telehealth.

Telehealth is a valuable tool for meeting the needs of Marylanders, particularly individuals with disabilities. United Spinal Association strongly supports technology-neutral telehealth laws and regulations for the purpose of improving public access to high-quality health care. For people in rural areas and individuals living with spinal cord injuries and other paralyzing conditions, obtaining in-person care can be a difficult process.

While it is important that telehealth providers be regulated to protect the public, it is equally important that policies not be designed to impede access. Passing SB 402 and HB 448 in their current form would ensure that individuals with disabilities across the state of Maryland have greater access to medical care from providers that comply with Federal and State requirements. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Stephen Lieberman, Director of Policy & Advocacy, at slieberman@unitedspinal.org or (202) 556-2076, x7104.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexandra Bennewith".

Alexandra Bennewith, MPA
Vice President, Government Relations