

SB3 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021

Senate Finance Committee – January 27, 2021

Testimony of Thomas Vento, M.D., Community Physician Enterprise, LifeBridge Health

Position: **SUPPORT**

I am writing in strong SUPPORT of SB3. I am a physician in a community-based practice affiliated with LifeBridge Health, a regional health system serving Central Maryland. As a primary care physician in practice in Westminster, Maryland, I have seen dramatic improvement in compliance and patient satisfaction resulting from the increase in use of telehealth. While COVID-19 drove increased utilization of telehealth, this modality quickly became a favored method of providing and receiving timely, effective care. We quickly adapted to the new world, and were pleased that both federal and state governments provided necessary waivers to allow use of this technology.

Quite frankly, it's 2021, and medicine must change. Primary care has remained vastly unchanged, although certainly our focus over the last 20 years has shifted to prevention, but the way we practice medicine has not changed. The embrace of technology over this last year has benefitted patients far more than it has physicians. If we were to pull back this advancement it would only hurt patients. We must make healthcare accessible to everyone. Embrace the technology, continue to allow patients to choose this method when appropriate.

A few examples of types of patients and encounters show how beneficial telehealth is in my practice:

- Elderly patients who have limited access to transportation, especially in our county. Some of my patients do not have family members that can bring them in when needed. The telehealth visits have been a great way for them to communicate with me about their health issues and medication concerns.
- Mental Health: The greatest benefit I have seen is in treating mental health. As a family physician, I estimate at least 25% of my patient visits are strictly mental health. Telemedicine visits make patients more comfortable talking to me from their own homes. It has always been a struggle to get patients into the office for these visits, as there is still a stigma attached to mental health.
- Patients not needing to leave work to come to an in-person appointment. This has always been an issue, and now patients that don't necessarily require in person visits enjoy this benefit.
- Audio-only (telephone) - especially for the older population who cannot always get the technology quite right, or have limited access to computers or WiFi.

This bill allows us to continue to ensure continuity of care for patients because I am able to see or speak with them as appropriate in a timely manner, encouraging consistent follow up and compliance. I urge the committee's FAVORABLE report on SB3 Preserve Telehealth Access Act, to help me continue to provide my patients the care they need in a manner they desire.

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