

**Testimony of Work Life Behavioral Health and Professional Training owner
LaToya Nkongolo, LCSW-C, LCADC**

**Before the
Senate Finance Committee**

**Hearing on
SB393**

January 27, 2021

Thank you, Chair and committee members for allowing me to testify at this important hearing. My name is LaToya Nkongolo, and I am a licensed clinical social worker, licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor. My husband and I own Work Life Behavioral Health located in Glen Burnie, MD, in Anne Arundel County. Our clientele consists of individuals ages 4 and over receiving services, both in person and in home. Many live across the county in suburban and rural areas and many have limited access to transportation and internet services. Approximately 54% of our recipients of Medicaid/Medicare, approximately 31% have private insurance, and 15% self-pay for services. The COVID pandemic forced us to be innovative in the way we provide services to the nearly 1,000 Anne Arundel County residents who trust us with their mental health and substance use counseling services. As a result of the pandemic, we transitioned to telehealth in March 2020 both by audio and/or telephone. My hope is to offer you some insight into my daily practice experience as a telehealth provider. I would like to share how various populations are benefitted from teletherapy services:

School Aged Youth- Youth are consistently attending teletherapy sessions in the comfort of their own home without the hardship of parents adjusting their work schedules to accommodate in person sessions.

Criminal Justice Population: We have seen an increase in services to those who are currently incarcerated, in addition to those who are in outpatient therapy to satisfy probation and parole requirements.

Geriatric Population: Myself and other therapists at Work Life offer in home therapy services to seniors and the disabled. Many of them have limited understanding of technology which was a concern. This population has benefitted from utilizing phone sessions as a means to remain consistent with treatment. Telehealth has eliminated the need for therapists to provide in home services which has decreased transportation time and allowed us to increase the number of clients we serve.

DSS Clients: Client who are required to receive counseling services have been able to comply this requirement while balancing work and other responsibilities.

Conclusion:

- The pandemic has forced us to use audio and/or visual technology which has shown to be a better way to make treatment more accessible to all.
- Telehealth has decreased barriers such as transportation, missed time from work and school.
- Telehealth has shown to decrease the cost of transportation services such as AAA Medicaid transportation and Medicare transportation.
- There been a reduction of missed appointments which has allowed patients to be more consistent with treatment and to transition to biweekly or monthly therapy sessions.
- Individuals in the criminal justice and child welfare systems are better able to meet the requirements of said systems while balancing work and family.

Thank you all for listening and for considering the critical need for clients to continue receiving the help they need through audio and/or visual teletherapy services.