
BILL NO: Senate Bill 567
TITLE: Telehealth Services – Expansion
COMMITTEE: Finance
HEARING DATE: February 17, 2021
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is a statewide nonprofit law firm that seeks to ensure the safety, economic security, and autonomy of women. Our mission is advanced through advocacy and also through direct legal representation of survivors of domestic violence. By increasing access to justice, we work to increase the independence of women throughout our state.

We write today in support of Senate Bill 567 and urge a favorable report. The bill provides for fair and consistent reimbursement policies for telehealth after the public health emergency has ended. Currently, coverage for many individuals for telehealth services is set to expire at the end of 2021. Yet, we know that the health needs, and the inability to easily access health care, will not end in this year.

In particular, the bill permits, and provides payment for, audio-only visits, which are critical for individuals without access to computers or broad band, so long as the treating provider determines it to be safe, effective, and clinically appropriate. Healthcare access, much like access to justice, should never be dependent upon financial resources and this legislation would help ensure that is the case. The pandemic has increased health disparities within our communities, and as women – and Women of Color in particular – continue to bear the brunt of those challenges, this legislation would be a step towards closing the gap in health care.

This legislation is an opportunity for our communities to learn from, and progress past, the challenges the current pandemic has created. SB 567 will propel us forward, rather than return us back. For those reasons, the WLC asks for a favorable report on the bill.

The Women's Law Center operates two legal hotlines, and three direct legal services projects: the Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, the Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors Project, and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.