



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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**House Bill 123
Preserve Telehealth Access Act 2021
Health Government Operations January 27, 2021
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2021 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials. **WDC urges the passage of HB0123.**

This bill will preserve several telehealth provisions in the Maryland Medical Assistance program initially enacted under the state of emergency proclaimed on March 5, 2020. It will continue to allow telehealth to be provided to program recipients regardless of the program recipients' location and allow a distant site provider to provide services from any location. Further it allows those services to be provided in an audio-only conversation. Reimbursement must be at the same rate as if the health care service were delivered by the health care provider in person. Increased flexibility around the delivery of telehealth has enabled Marylanders to access medical and behavioral health treatment in a safe and secure manner, and has become a vital part of Maryland's continuum of care.

Supporting data in favor of telehealth includes:

- Expanding of telehealth capabilities including audio-only services was instrumental in maintaining patient care for those experiencing difficulty in accessing in-person care due to disabilities, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, or inability to take time off from work.
- Reducing disparities in underserved urban and rural areas, advanced health equity for individuals with limited access to health care services and reduced the financial burden caused by missed work hours, transportation, and need for childcare.
- Increasing access and therefore health outcomes because patients are better able to keep their appointments and stay engaged in treatment. This is especially true for mental health and substance use disorder patients.
- Providing approximately 425,000 Marylanders who lack access to high-speed internet or cannot use audio-visual telehealth for other reasons making audio-only access essential. This is particularly true for mental health and substance use disorder patients and the homeless.
- Reimbursing at the same rate as if the health care service were delivered in person helps address the shortage of behavioral health and primary care providers and ensure treatment for a very vulnerable and often hard to treat group.

We ask for your support for HB0123 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Diana Conway
President