

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Del. Shane Pendergrass, Chairperson  
**Health and Government Operations**  
Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen St. RM. 241  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **SUPPORT FOR HB 731** – Telehealth Services – Expansion

Dear Chairperson Pendergrass and Distinguished Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

I want to thank you for taking my written statement of support for HB 731 on telehealth reimbursement to be entered into the public hearing record. My name is Sara Pula and I am a Counselor Educator and Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who resides and practices in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

Reimbursement for telebehavioral health modalities is important to me because I believe that all citizens should have access to mental health services. Allowing reimbursement for telebehavioral health services will ensure that mental health agencies and private clinicians can continue to provide these much-needed services and continue to remove barriers to access. We must continue to improve access to mental health services in our state.

We are still in the throes of a global pandemic and the need for health care and mental health services has never been greater. COVID-19 has revealed systemic flaws in our mental health services for providers and clients alike. It is imperative that we remove barriers to life saving services in a responsible and urgent manner.

This bill will update what Maryland health care services the Medical Assistance Program is required to provide through telehealth by broadening the circumstances under which the Program is required to provide telehealth and telebehavioral health. It is critical to update current Maryland code to align with best practices in our field by requiring certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations to reimburse health care services provided through telehealth.

While we are working to upload and implement the Counseling Compact in this state and throughout the U.S., this immediate action, removing barriers to critical supports and supporting mental health providers by broadening reimbursements in Maryland, is essential for the wellbeing of residents, families, and a social services system overburdened by staggering need.

I strongly urge you to support HB 731.

Sincerely,

Sara Pula, PhD, LCPC ACS  
President-Elect, Maryland Counseling Association  
1179 Bay Highlands Drive, Annapolis, MD