

TO: The Honorable Shane Pendergrass, Chair
House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Annie Coble
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Priority Partners offers its **support** to **House Bill 123 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021**. Priority Partners MCO (PPMCO) is the largest Medicaid managed care organization (MCO) in the State with over 324,000 members in the HealthChoice programs. Priority Partners is owned jointly by Johns Hopkins Health Care LLC and Maryland Community Health System, which consists of 7 Federally Qualified Health Centers. It has the distinction of being the only MCO with all staff and operations based in Maryland.

The Preserve Telehealth Access Act ensures the extension of four policy changes that continue to remove barriers to telehealth, thus allowing greater access to healthcare for all Marylanders. All of the policy changes are important, but PPMCO's data shows the ability to use audio only telehealth to be particularly valuable for Medicaid recipients.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth claims increased from 61 total claims in February 2020 to a high of 29,817 claims in May of 2020. Throughout the pandemic, 30% of all telehealth claims have been for audio-only services for this population. This is not surprising as the Medicaid members are lower income, and PPMCO serves a large portion of the Eastern Shore. Both, lower income and residents on the Eastern Shore, have problems accessing internet needed to complete audio-visual telehealth. If reimbursement for audio-only services does not continue, these Marylanders will not have access to care.

As an MCO in the HealthChoice program, ensuring our members have access to quality care is a top priority. Telehealth, and audio-only, has become a vital tool in providing quality care to all Marylanders and we cannot move backwards.

For these reasons and others, Priority Partners urges a favorable report on **HB 123 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021**.