



House Bill 731 – Telehealth Services – Expansion
Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 10, 2021
Position: SUPPORT

The University of Maryland Medical System strongly supports HB 731 – Telehealth Services Expansion. The COVID-19 public health emergency accelerated the maturity of our Telehealth programs across the University of Maryland Medical System’s (UMMS) thirteen member hospitals, affiliated practices, medical groups, and urgent care clinics. The ability to deliver care virtually during the pandemic became critically important for our patients from an access and safety perspective. Access to telehealth services without geographic restrictions, and via audio only transmission, helped ensure that patients could receive care where they are based on consumer choice and safety, and adjudicated by clinical judgment. Patients have expressed a high degree of patient satisfaction about the availability of, and the care delivered through Telehealth Services. For the benefit of our patients, we plan to continue this high quality virtual care option beyond the pandemic, with your help.

HB 731 would expand the health care services that the Maryland Medical Assistance Program is required to provide through telehealth. The approval of this bill would allow patients enable patients to receive health care services through telehealth regardless of their location. The pandemic has caused a sudden surge in unemployment resulting in the loss of employer-sponsored insurance for many Marylanders. It is critical that our citizens are able to receive the same telehealth services as they would if they were still covered by an employer sponsored insurance program. Additionally, many citizens have had to move farther away from metropolitan areas to reduce their living expenses; our residents in more rural areas of the state already face a number of obstacles regarding access to care. The implementation of telehealth services has been one of our greatest tools in combatting access to care and alleviating the disparity in these regions.

Telehealth Services allow us to optimize technology to support secure, HIPAA compliant virtual care especially for underserved populations. Telehealth technology allows for the continuity of care helping to enhance patient wellness, and improve efficiency and quality of care—with increased patient satisfaction. We also experienced access to real-time information related to social determinants of health which impact the lives of many patients in the communities that we serve. The efforts at greater provider to patient communication, and trust help lead to improved health outcomes, reduced cost and duplication of services.

As a critical component of our COVID-19 mitigation strategy and infection prevention efforts, Telehealth programs were implemented across the University of Maryland Medical System hospitals and its affiliated health care locations. This includes Telehealth programs for primary and specialty care and remote Emergency Department Triage services. In response to the public health emergency, telehealth services allowed physicians and other providers to deliver care to our patients while supporting social distancing efforts, reducing exposure and spread of SARS-CoV-2 and other diseases, and reducing the utilization of personal protective equipment (a high value commodity during the public health emergency).

It is critical to our COVID-19 mitigation strategy that recipients of the Maryland Medical Assistance Program are able to receive health care services through telehealth so that we may continue to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

We look to your leadership in enacting this legislation. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 731.

Respectfully submitted,

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