



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

January 27, 2021

House Bill 123 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 123 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021.

MRHA supports this legislation that allows for the delivery of appropriate audio only health care services, removal of originating and distant site restrictions, expansion of remote patient monitoring that align with initiatives that support the Maryland Total Cost of Care Model, and for the same reimbursement for services that would be delivered in person, delivered via telehealth.

This legislation ensures that rural and underserved populations are not left behind in receiving quality and equitable health care in the COVID-19 pandemic. These populations not only rely on telehealth for the delivery of essential health care but rely on transportation and other access barriers to be eliminated when receiving care. Further, many rural Marylanders either do not have a smartphone, or high-speed broadband access to support traditional telehealth delivery. This legislation provides the ability for audio only health care delivery and providers to be fairly compensated for the various telehealth services they offer. Telehealth infrastructure must be maintained and expanded during this pandemic to ensure rural Marylanders and beyond can access safe and reliable health care.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

Maryland law states that "many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure." (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b) MHRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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