



Sheppard Pratt

**Written Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
SB534 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023
February 21, 2023
Position: SUPPORT**

Sheppard Pratt thanks the Maryland General Assembly for your longstanding leadership and support of mental and behavioral health providers in Maryland. This testimony outlines the Sheppard Pratt support for SB534 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023. It is our hope that the Maryland General Assembly will pass this legislation to continue these important measures.

As the COVID-19 pandemic began in Maryland, Sheppard Pratt worked tirelessly to ensure that we could continue to help both individuals in crisis and our existing patients access life-changing care. While the pandemic was and continues to be devastating, telehealth especially in the mental and behavioral health sphere has been life-changer for our patients. In calendar year 2022, Sheppard Pratt delivered nearly 193,000 telehealth services statewide.

Telehealth services are not only preferred by patients but show outcomes that are identical to in person services so long as telehealth is the right clinical modality for the patient and condition. Today, telehealth services are our largest volume of services, despite an intense effort to have clients return for in person appointments

Thanks to emergency orders enabling reimbursement for telehealth, we successfully launched our virtual services. With a swift pivot from an in-person walk-in clinic (which we continue to provide), Sheppard Pratt expanded our crisis services and outpatient mental health and addiction services to telehealth—offering psychiatric medication management, psychotherapy, addiction counseling and case management through a secure, online platform. In our outpatient clinics across the State, approximately 60 percent of all appointments are now virtual. We serve over 10,000 patients in our outpatient services alone.

This virtual expansion equated to thousands of individuals who have been able to access the care they desperately needed—many of whom had previously been hindered by location, lack of transportation, or other common barriers. Importantly, this service has eased burdens on emergency departments across the State at a time when all available beds are needed for our acute care patients.

Telehealth has allowed us to maintain our programs and provide outpatient services to those in need throughout the crisis. These services have also allowed patients and family members to continue their employment without needing to leave and attend an in-person appointment.

Approximately 15 percent of our services are telephonic for those clients who do not have technology, or transportation to come into a clinic for mental health services. Sheppard Pratt stresses the need to continue the audio-only and telephonic options. We cannot emphasize enough the value this expansion



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has been to our most vulnerable Marylanders—the BIPOC communities, those on Medicaid, the homeless, and those in a mental health crisis. Based on our experience supporting clients throughout the pandemic there are a large number of clients who have phones but do not have access to video-based technology. Without audio services they will not be able to access mental health treatment.

Sheppard Pratt stresses that our costs are identical no matter that modality of delivery: in person, video telehealth, or audio telehealth.

Sheppard Pratt urges the committee’s favorable report on SB534 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023.

About Sheppard Pratt

Sheppard Pratt is the nation’s largest private, nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, developmental disability, special education, and social services in the country. A nationwide resource, Sheppard Pratt provides services across a comprehensive continuum of care, spanning both hospital- and community-based resources. Since its founding in 1853, Sheppard Pratt has been innovating the field through research, best practice implementation, and a focus on improving the quality of mental health care on a global level. Sheppard Pratt has been consistently ranked as a top national psychiatric hospital by *U.S. News & World Report* for nearly 30 years.