



Testimony on SB 852
Behavioral Health Care – Treatment and Access
(Behavioral Health Model for Maryland)
Telehealth
Senate Finance Committee
March 7, 2023
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland (CBH) is the leading voice for community-based providers serving the mental health and addiction needs of vulnerable Marylanders. Our 110 members serve the majority of those accessing care through the public behavioral health system. CBH members provide outpatient and residential treatment for mental health and addiction-related disorders, day programs, case management, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), employment supports, and crisis intervention.

The combined impacts of the COVID pandemic and a workforce crisis that predated the pandemic require creative solutions – including the expanded use of technology – in order to meet current and projected demand for behavioral health services. The use of video and audio-only telehealth has proven invaluable in serving those with mental health and substance use disorders who otherwise would have foregone the treatment and support services that help avert the use of higher – and more expensive – levels of care.

It is critical that audio-only telehealth be allowed to continue since many of our clients lack the financial means to purchase smart phones or other video technology and the data plans to support them. Others live in rural areas where broadband coverage is spotty at best. Without ongoing supports through audio-only telehealth these individuals will face great difficulty in accessing needed medications and therapy.

We are also supportive of the continuation of rate parity between services provided through telehealth and those conducted in-person. The licensure and documentation requirements remain the same regardless of the mode of communication. In fact, the use of telehealth helps us to most efficiently use our scarce human resources to meet the increased behavioral health demand. Our workforce crisis is very real. Forcing lower rates for the use of telehealth would jeopardize our ability to maintain our already stretched staff and likely cause providers to eliminate telehealth as an option.

CBH has surveyed its members over the past two years to determine the impact of telehealth on our organizations, their staff, and those served. Our surveys show a high satisfaction rate among both staff and clients regarding telehealth services. We have also seen no-show rates plummet as those who struggled with transportation challenges, restrictive work schedules, and child care are now able to take advantage of the flexibility that telehealth provides.

Telehealth – both audio-visual and audio-only – have changed the service delivery landscape and allowed those with serious behavioral health disorders to access care. It has also allowed providers to make the most efficient use of a stretched workforce.

We urge a favorable report on SB 582.