



**DATE:** February 22, 2023

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance

**BILL NO:** Senate Bill 534

**BILL TITLE:** Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023

**POSITION:** Support

## **Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 534 - Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023**

### **Bill Summary:**

Senate Bill 534 extends the sunset of the Preserve Telehealth Access Act until 2025. This legislation extends the use of certain audio-only in telehealth and extends the reimbursement parity and coverage between in-person and telehealth services by Maryland Medical Assistance and other insurers.

### **Background:**

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

**Telehealth Services:** Kennedy Krieger serves approximately 25,000 families per year, of whom a third are Medicaid recipients. Kennedy Krieger telehealth services include diagnoses, treatments, consultation, and education. Early in the pandemic, Kennedy Krieger transitioned most outpatient services to telehealth, with a gradual decrease as in person services increased. Since June 2022, telehealth has represented approximately 45% of outpatient services, averaging 2,300 telehealth visits per week. Behavioral health services make up 82% of all telehealth services, with therapies reflecting 10% and medical services reflecting 8%.

### **Rationale for telehealth parity:**

Telehealth services are feasible, safe, efficient, and effective. Telehealth is not appropriate for all conditions, or for all patients, but it has greatly increased the access and ease with which patients can access care. It allows families across the state access to the highest quality of services and providers available, without being limited to local services. This is crucial for Kennedy Krieger, who provides specialized services for children with rare disorders and diseases. Although telehealth is a significant time and money saver for families, these benefits do not extend to providers and healthcare organizations. Early assumptions that telehealth could be delivered less expensively than in person services have not been shown to be accurate. There is substantial infrastructure necessary to provide high-quality telehealth services. If telehealth is reimbursed at a lower rate than in person services, healthcare providers will be forced to offer only in-person services, and patients will be limited to local services or will have to experience great disruptions from work, home and school to travel for services. Those with limited resources will be affected most, going from receiving high quality, specialized care to receiving no care at all. Reimbursement parity is crucial for the future of telehealth and the continuation of healthcare access.

### **Rationale for audio-only:**

The pandemic highlighted many health inequities, including having access to reliable internet services and devices. Although telehealth improved access to care, many inequities remain. At Kennedy Krieger, most families connect with their provider through a secure, HIPAA-compliant web-based portal from the privacy of their homes. Kennedy Krieger received two Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grants to provide iPads and internet hotspots to families who lacked such equipment for telehealth services. Even with this program, which Kennedy Krieger continues to fund, there are families for whom audio-only services are necessary. The continuation of audio-only services, when the patient requests it and when the provider feels it is clinically appropriate, is crucial to maintain equitable access to healthcare.

**Kennedy Krieger urges the committee to vote favorably on Senate Bill 534.**