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**TO:** Health and Government Operations Committee  
**FROM:** LeadingAge Maryland  
**SUBJECT:** Senate Bill 534, Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023  
**DATE:** March 21, 2023  
**POSITION:** **Favorable**

LeadingAge Maryland supports Senate Bill 534, Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023.

LeadingAge Maryland is a community of more than 140 not-for-profit aging services organizations serving residents and clients through continuing care retirement communities, affordable senior housing, assisted living, nursing homes and home and community-based services. Our mission is to expand the world of possibilities for aging in Maryland. We partner with consumers, caregivers, researchers, public agencies, faith communities and others who care about aging in Maryland.

Senate Bill 534 extends to June 30, 2025, the inclusion of audio-only telephone conversations under the definition of "telehealth." This bill provides reimbursement and coverage of telehealth by the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations. As amended, Senate Bill 534 also requires the Maryland Health Care Commission to study and make recommendations regarding the delivery of health care services through telehealth, including payment parity for the delivery of health care services through audiovisual and audio-only telehealth technologies.

As telehealth moved to the forefront of health care delivery throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it proved to be viable in disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. The use of telehealth in the U.S increased by more than 3,000 percent from 2019 to 2020. Providers were able to deliver, and patients were able to receive, safe and timely care during the public health emergency (PHE).

In the state of Maryland, telehealth adoption rates for physician practices rose from 11% pre-PHE to 70% during PHE, and those for nursing homes rose from 9% to 75%. As our population ages, we must strive to be better equipped in dealing with chronic illness and health

disparities. Audio-only services allow equitable access to care for vulnerable populations, especially older individuals, who might struggle from limited access to technology, digital illiteracy, or unstable housing. They also provide easier access to those who reside in low-income, underserved, or rural communities.

Providers, through telehealth, are able to remotely monitor patients with chronic diseases, to coordinate care and follow-up, and to provide timely treatment and therapy adjustments when needed. Patients would be allowed expanded access and flexibility when seeking services; they are offered the comfort of choosing where to receive care, which could help minimize stigma related to specific services. They would also have less barriers to care; those include transportation, debilitating conditions, taking time off work, financial barriers, and others. Telehealth could also play a role in promoting patient engagement, self-management, and overall satisfaction with the process of receiving health care.

At LeadingAge Maryland, we advocate for better health outcomes, especially for older populations who are at highest risk of needing long term care. Appropriate access to high quality and affordable care is a critical factor in treating chronic illness and addressing health and health care disparities. We believe the continued use of telehealth and the inclusion of audio-only services stated in Senate Bill 534 would help us in achieving better health outcomes, reducing costs, and promoting patient-centered care.

For these reasons, LeadingAge Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report for Senate Bill 534.

For additional information, please contact Aaron J. Greenfield, 410.446.1992