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MAYOR

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**SB 534**

February 22, 2023

**TO:** Members of the Senate Finance Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** Senate Bill 534 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 534.

SB 534 will extend until June 30, 2025, the inclusion of certain audio-only telephone conversations under the definition of "telehealth." This will allow for the reimbursement and insurance coverage of telehealth services by the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations.

During the pandemic, telehealth services have been able to fill health care gaps by increasing access to care for many patients. CDC data shows that 37% of adults aged 18 and older used telehealth services during 2021.<sup>1</sup> As adoption of these services increases, many benefits have been reported such as convenience, shorter wait times for appointments, and slowing the spread of disease by limiting exposure.<sup>2</sup> Looking forward, telehealth can continue to provide increased opportunities for people to receive health care in a safe and equitable manner. In particular, telehealth can be a more accessible option for those who live far away from providers (such as rural residents), residents with mobility challenges, people without access to transportation, and individuals who are immunocompromised for whom it is safer to see a provider from home. Telehealth can also be cost-saving for Marylanders, as it can eliminate the need for childcare, reduce time patients would need to take off of work, and eliminate transportation costs.<sup>2</sup>

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 534, which extends the date of reimbursement and coverage of telehealth services by the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and other insurers within the state. We believe telehealth services can continue to provide vital access to care for many Maryland residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Telemedicine Use Among Adults: United States, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db445.htm#ref1>

<sup>2</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration. (2022). What is telehealth? Retrieved from <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/understanding-telehealth/#benefits-of-telehealth>