



**Senate Bill 534**  
**Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023**

Finance Committee  
February 22, 2023

**Support**

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 534 which would extend the current telehealth law for two years.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors. We recognize the importance of providing services to individuals in a variety of manners so that the individual can access services in the way that best meets their needs.

Each day, Catholic Charities staff interact with Marylanders facing challenges and difficulties, those challenges and difficulties escalated during the Pandemic. COVID-19 has laid to bare longstanding inequities in our systems, including inequitable access to behavioral health services. However, one area that has been a bright spot in an otherwise dark time is that many children, youth and adults were able to continue their therapy relationships through telehealth.

Catholic Charities provides a continuum of behavioral health services throughout Western and Central Maryland with outpatient clinics in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Frederick, Harford and Allegany Counties, as well as Baltimore City. We also offer school based behavioral health services in over 100 schools in the vicinity of the clinics. Prior to March of 2020, we offered limited telehealth services. Faced with a massive disruption in services due to COVID, we ramped telehealth services to a peak of 3,500 telehealth visits a week. We now offer about 1,500 telehealth visits per week.

Over the past three years, we have learned many lessons on how to appropriately deliver services. We know that telehealth is not for everyone, but for many of our clients, telehealth has been a critical tool to reaching them where they are – including the use of audio-only telehealth. Senate Bill 534 continues the flexibilities and guiderails for the provision of telehealth services in Maryland.

**For the reasons listed above, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 534.**

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy