



DATE: February 28, 2024 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy and the Environment
BILL NO: Senate Bill 492
BILL TITLE: Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access
POSITION: Support with amendments

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports, with amendments: Senate Bill 492 - Public Schools - Student Telehealth Appointments - Policy and Access.

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 492 requires each local board of education to establish a policy to accommodate public middle and high school students who need to participate in telehealth appointments scheduled during the school day.

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. Over 27,000 individuals receive services annually at Kennedy Krieger. We employ more than 2,600 persons who play a vital role in our mission to transform the lives of children with disorders of the brain.

Kennedy Krieger Telehealth services include evaluation, treatment, education, and consultation. Kennedy Krieger has provided telebehavioral health services since 2015. During the height of the pandemic, nearly 95% of all Kennedy Krieger outpatient services were delivered via telehealth. Over the last year, we have consistently delivered approximately 40% of sessions through telehealth, with 70% of all behavioral health sessions occurring via telehealth. These include a combination of hybrid, where the family also attends in person, and exclusive telehealth, where patient needs are sufficiently met via remote delivery.

Rationale:

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 state-wide access is crucial for Kennedy Krieger, who provides specialized services for children with rare disorders and diseases.** Allowing students to attend sessions via telehealth from school increases equitable access and reduces barriers to care.

Amendments:

At the core of any telehealth session are a provider's clinical judgment of what is most appropriate for that patient as well as the patient and caregiver preference for how they receive clinical care.

We appreciate that the 2024 legislation includes language that requires the implementation of safety and privacy for students participating in a telehealth appointment. However, we feel that the following should be considered to further support student safety:

- The provider would need to know the exact location of the student during the session (not just 'at school').
- The school would need to know when and where sessions were occurring.
- Someone at the school must be available to the provider by phone during the entirety of the session for any emergency or urgent need that the therapist identifies.

As an example, if a student is exhibiting or expressing thoughts of self-harm (i.e., suicidal ideation) or thoughts of harming others, the provider would be able to call a pre-identified school personnel to immediately locate the student and assist in emergency. If a provider were to call the main office phone number of the school, there could be unfortunate delays in getting that student the care they need immediately.

It is our strong recommendation that Local Education Agencies work in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education and the provider community to form these policies to ensure that students are able to access telehealth sessions in a safe and supported environment.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report with amendments on Senate Bill 492.

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