



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

March 12, 2024

Senate Bill 0786: Task Force on Access to Pharmacy Services and the Impact of Telepharmacy in Maryland

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0786: Task Force on Access to Pharmacy Services and the Impact of Telepharmacy in Maryland.

Pharmacies play an essential role in the deliverance of quality healthcare for all members of our communities, especially for Maryland's rural residents. Pharmacies and their offered services bridge the gap between initiation of care and compliance while tackling multifaceted disparities. Such disparities include but are not limited to geographical location, lack of public transportation, race/ethnicity, and low income. Acting as an interceptor between the physician and patient, pharmacists are able to provide basic health education and offer support to the patient to ensure treatment compliance. This saves time and prevents undue stress for patients as they do not need to make an appointment with the doctor's office but simply visit the pharmacist at their earliest convenience.

The shortage of providers has impacted all aspects of our healthcare system, and pharmacists are no different. In rural areas specifically, if there is a shortage of operating pharmacies, it results in longer commutes in efforts to find one in service. With the emergence of telepharmacy, it has proven beneficial to residents across various communities as it improves access to care. Offering services ranging from medication reconciliation to patient education, telepharmacy increases quality and access to care for all residents. According to Dr. Charles Peterson, a leader in the North Dakota Telepharmacy Project, he has found that improved medication adherence, reduced medication errors, lower burden on the hospital systems, and improved patient outcomes are only a few of the benefits telepharmacy has offered to his rural communities. It has also brought in \$26.5 million in economic development to the local rural economy including adding 80-100 new jobs (North Dakota State University, 2023). This program is one of several around the country who all have reported similar results. To better serve our communities, assessing the current barriers in pharmacy access is essential to catering to the individualized needs of our Maryland rural communities.

After seeing the success that the implementation of telepharmacy has improved the health of rural communities around the nation, the Maryland Rural Health Association is in favor of SB0786 as it would increase access to healthcare in underserved communities, reduce hospitalizations, and potentially create jobs for rural residents.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
Jonathan Dayton, MS, NREMT, CNE, Executive Director
jdayton@mdruralhealth.org*