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HB 869
Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025
Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee
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1:00 PM

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports HB 869**, which would permanently preserve telehealth access for Maryland Medical Assistance (Medicaid) patients and the definition of telehealth to include audio-only conversations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Hogan issued emergency legislation and Maryland received federal waivers to expand Medicaid telehealth services coverage. These changes transformed the way Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries accessed care during the pandemic. Between February to April 2020, services delivered via telehealth among Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries rose by 2,632% across the country compared to March to June 2019.¹ This rise in services was the highest among working age adults, children and seniors.² We thank the Maryland General Assembly for taking action to preserve this expansion in Maryland's law following the public health emergency.

Telehealth plays a critical role in expanding access to care for patients where they are and when they need it. Patients who lack access to transportation and/or childcare may not be able to easily visit a provider in person. Likewise, a patient may reside in a healthcare desert where locating a primary or specialty care physician is challenging and may not have access to a stable internet connection. Medicaid and CHIP patients without internet access would be disproportionately impacted if telehealth services were restricted, including patients residing in rural counties. HB 869 recognizes that the availability of asynchronous telehealth and audio-only

¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, *Services Delivered via Telehealth Among Medicaid & CHIP Beneficiaries during COVID-19* (2020), <https://www.medicare.gov/resources-for-states/downloads/medicaid-chip-beneficiaries-COVID-19-snapshot-data-through-20200630.pdf>.

² *Id.*

conversations not only keeps patients connected to care, but allows health providers to swiftly determine, through an oral or visual assessment, whether a patient needs to be triaged for in-person urgent or emergency care.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS HB 869** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please contact Ashley Woolard at (410) 625-9409, ext. 224 or woolarda@publicjustice.org.