



**Testimony to the House Health and Government Operations Committee**

**HB869- The Preserve Telehealth Act**

**Position: Favorable**

2/13/2025

The Honorable Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair

Senate Finance Committee

240 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

cc: Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee:

Economic Action Maryland Fund (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that advances economic rights and equity for Maryland families through research, education, direct service, and advocacy. Our 12,500 supporters include consumer advocates, practitioners, and low-income and working families throughout Maryland.

I am writing today to urge your strong support of HB869, the Preserve Telehealth Act, which would ensure continued access to and reimbursement for telehealth services, particularly audio-only telephone conversations, and codify permanent protections for audio-only telehealth services.

Since COVID, audio-only telehealth has been a lifeline, particularly for older adults and low-income families. It has allowed them to access critical health care services without the need for expensive technology, reliable internet, or the ability to travel to a doctor's office. For those living in rural areas or communities with limited transportation options and few nearby hospitals, telehealth has been nothing short of transformative.

Economic Action's SOAR (Securing Older Adult Resources) Program works with older adults across the state, providing assistance with social benefit and tax credit applications. Throughout this work, one thing remains incredibly clear: although our society continues to move toward digitalization, many low-income older adults do not have access to a computer at home.

Beyond older adults, an estimated one in three households in Baltimore City do not have a desktop computer or laptop, and 40% of households do not have internet.<sup>1</sup> Not only are Black and Brown communities are hit most hard by the digital divide,<sup>2</sup> but they also face major disparities when it comes to health outcomes and healthcare services.<sup>3</sup>

Because of this, audio-only telehealth protections are crucial for ensuring that vulnerable communities are still able to access telehealth resources without a computer. The current temporary provisions allowing

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<sup>1</sup> [https://abell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020\\_Abell\\_digital20divide\\_full20report\\_FINAL\\_web20dr.pdf](https://abell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020_Abell_digital20divide_full20report_FINAL_web20dr.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> [https://health.maryland.gov/bonha/Documents/Health\\_Care\\_Disparities\\_Policy\\_Report\\_Card.pdf](https://health.maryland.gov/bonha/Documents/Health_Care_Disparities_Policy_Report_Card.pdf)

audio-only telehealth are set to expire on June 30, 2025, which would leave countless Marylanders without access to the care they need. HB869 is necessary to prevent this sunset and ensure this crucial service is still affordably available to all Marylanders.

Considering both the digital divide and major disparities in the healthcare system, access to telehealth is not just a matter of convenience, it is a matter of health equity.

For these reasons, I urge your favorable report on HB869.

Thank you.

Best,  
Zoe Gallagher