

HB869
Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025
Health and Government Operations Committee
February 13, 2025
Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports House Bill 869, which would make telehealth services, including audio-only phone calls, permanently eligible for reimbursement at the same rate as in-person visits.

For over a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We support Marylanders as they age with dignity, pursue employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As the second-largest provider of behavioral health services in Maryland, Catholic Charities offers a broad range of mental and behavioral health services for children, adults, and families. Through our programs, we provide mental health screenings, counseling, therapy, psychiatric rehabilitation, substance use disorder treatment, medication management, and telehealth services. From January 2024 to December 2024, our Villa Maria Behavioral Health outpatient clinics conducted a total of 55,472 telehealth sessions for 4,329 clients. These sessions included therapy, psychiatric services, and psychiatric rehabilitation (PRP). Of these, approximately 6,000 sessions were conducted via audio-only (telephone) communication, with the remaining sessions utilizing video platforms. Audio-only sessions are critical for clients who cannot attend in person and lack reliable internet access.

Access to telehealth significantly expands the availability of services. Many of our clients rely on a hybrid model that combines in-person and telehealth services. Without this flexibility, individuals facing transportation barriers, complex work schedules, childcare responsibilities, physical disabilities, or other challenges would be unable to engage in care. This would lead to higher rates of missed appointments, undermining the effectiveness of treatment, or in many cases, prevent them from seeking care altogether. Telehealth also allows parents of children engaged in school-based services to participate in therapy from any location, eliminating the need to take time off work or arrange alternative childcare.

Behavioral health is just as important as overall medical health, and services addressing health needs should be reimbursed equally, regardless of whether they are delivered in-person or via telehealth.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB869.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy