



Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work

TO: The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair
The Honorable Bonnie Cullison, Vice-Chair
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Judith Gallant, LCSW-C, Director, GWSCSW Legislation and Advocacy

DATE: February 13, 2025

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 869 – *Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025*

I thank Madame Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair Cullison, and the Health and Government Operations Committee members for the opportunity to share our strong support for House Bill 869. I am Judith Gallant, the Director of the Legislation and Advocacy Branch of the Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work (GWSCSW). The Society includes clinical social workers practicing in the three jurisdictions of the DMV, with 50 percent of our membership licensed and living in Maryland.

House Bill 869 would repeal the limitation on the period during which certain audio-only telephone conversations are included under the definition of “telehealth” for the purpose of certain provisions of law relating to reimbursement and coverage of telehealth from the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans and health maintenance organizations. It would also repeal the limitation on the period during which the Program and certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations are required to provide reimbursement for certain health care services provided through telehealth at the same rate as in-person sessions.

Telemental health, including audio-only sessions, was implemented in March, 2020, due to the pandemic. It has been found by both therapists and patients to be an effective and efficient way of providing needed mental health care. The prevalence of mental health conditions increased 20-40% into 2024 and show no signs of being lowered to pre-pandemic levels. Telehealth, including audio-only sessions, are crucial to providing mental health services to isolated adults who may have limitations on their ability to travel for healthcare, the bandwidth provided in order to receive these services, or their limited income or technical ability to navigate the interface to use these services. In these instances, audio-only sessions provides a life-line that is crucial for many of our seniors and others with limited ability to access audio-visual sessions for their care

GWSCSW believes it is crucially important to continue to allow these services to continue without interruption or restrictions on a therapist’s income and firmly supports House Bill 869. We know this committee has great concern for the mental health of Marylanders, and hope that you will provide a favorable report.

For more information call 410-244-7000:
Christine K. Krone
Danna L. Kauffman