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HB 869 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025
Senate Finance Committee
February 13, 2025

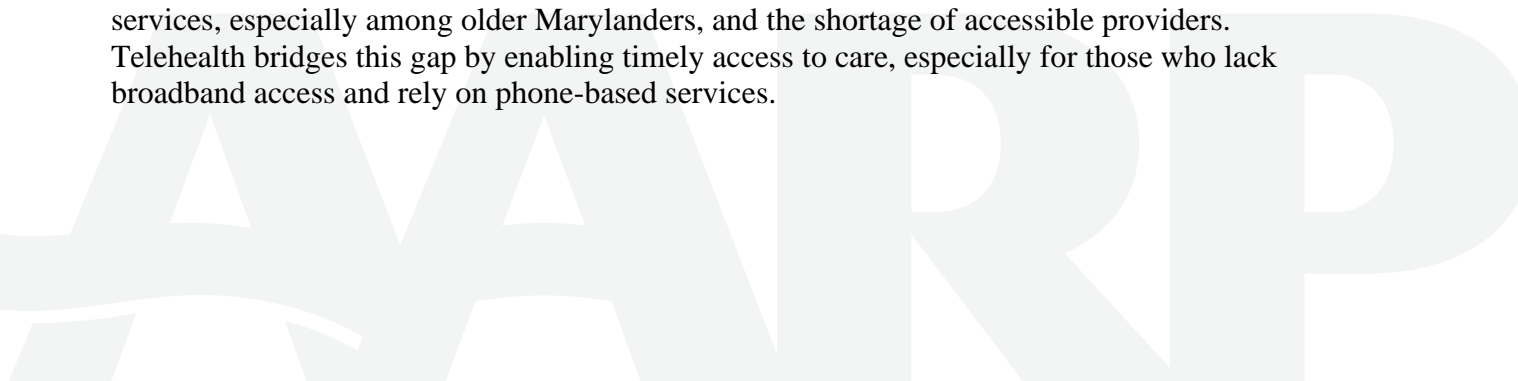
Good afternoon, Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Jim Gutman, a resident of Columbia, Maryland, and the lead health care advocacy volunteer for AARP Maryland, which represents 850,000 members aged 50 and older. I also served on the Maryland Health Care Commission's telehealth policy workgroup in recent years and have been a SHIP volunteer counselor in Maryland for nine years. I am here today on behalf of AARP Maryland to express our strong support for HB 869, the Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025, introduced by Chair Pena-Melnyk.

One of the few positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic was the recognition of telehealth as a critical tool for ensuring high-quality healthcare for all Marylanders. Telehealth has been especially vital for older adults, who often face financial and mobility challenges that hinder timely access to in-person healthcare services. For many of these Marylanders, telehealth has been nothing short of a lifesaver. However, key provisions of the state's landmark Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021 and its 2023 extension are set to expire on June 30 unless the General Assembly acts to preserve them.

HB 869 would provide this permanence. It includes essential provisions, such as requiring reimbursement for telehealth services—whether delivered via video or phone—to be on par with in-person services. This parity applies to both Maryland's Medicaid program and commercial health insurance in the state.

The bill also includes necessary safeguards to ensure that reimbursed telehealth services remain clinically appropriate. For example, telehealth is defined in a way that generally excludes communication via email and fax. The legislation emphasizes that telehealth must be used only when it aligns with the patient's medical needs and preferences. It does not mandate reimbursement for non-covered services or care provided by out-of-network providers, except in certain cases.

Critically, HB 869 mandates that insurers offering coverage for behavioral health services provided in person cannot deny coverage simply because those services are delivered via telehealth. This is particularly significant given the ongoing demand for behavioral health services, especially among older Marylanders, and the shortage of accessible providers. Telehealth bridges this gap by enabling timely access to care, especially for those who lack broadband access and rely on phone-based services.



For all these reasons, AARP Maryland strongly supports HB 869. We respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Tammy Bresnahan at tbresnahan@arp.org or 410-302-8451.