

**Testimony Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 13, 2025**

House Bill 869 – Preserve Telehealth Act of 2025

**** Support ****

The National Association of Social Workers is the largest professional association of social workers in the country, and the Maryland Chapter represents social workers across the state. We support House Bill 869 and urge you to vote in favor of authorizing continued reimbursement for telehealth access by way of permanent inclusion of audio-only telephone conversations as a reimbursed healthcare service.

This bill touches on a significant equity issue. Providers experience clients who have malfunctions that require audio-only psychotherapy sessions because problems with their computer microphone or camera, or their internet is spotty or goes down. Many clients do not have regular access to the technology needed for audio-visual telehealth, while others may be older and not inclined to use it.

Requirements for in-person visits, especially for mental health and substance use disorder services, create unnecessary barriers and risks to patients. Transportation to and from appointments can be challenging for people who live in areas without access to public transportation, and people who are older and have disabilities whose disability transit is unreliable. Audio sessions can avoid risks and overcome challenges that allow patients to get the treatment they need.

Clients who use audio-only sessions express that audio-only delivered psychotherapy as a healthcare service has been an effective and stabilizing modality for them and they appreciate having it. In many cases, clients would not be able to receive psychotherapy to stabilize mental health without having access audio only sessions.

For these and many other reasons, we ask that you give a favorable report on Senate Bill 372.

Respectfully,

Karessa Proctor, BSW, MSW
Executive Director, NASW-MD