



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the House Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

February 8, 2025

House Bill 869- Preserve Telehealth Access of 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) are in strong SUPPORT of House Bill 869, the Preserve Telehealth Access of 2025. This legislation is crucial for ensuring continued access to telehealth services, particularly audio-only telephone calls, by removing limitations on insurance reimbursement that are set to expire by June 30th, 2025.

Rural communities have long faced significant barriers in healthcare access, including healthcare provider shortage, limited broadband access, and transportation options. In recent years, these rural communities, including those in Maryland, have increasingly relied on telehealth services to overcome some of these obstacles, enabling them to receive timely care¹.

Maryland rural communities are part of the 20% of the national rural population served by less than 10% of U.S. physicians with only 5.1 primary care physicians per 10,000 residents versus 8.0 primary care physicians per 10,000 urban residents². Due to this critical shortage, residents have resourced video telehealth and audio telehealth services, which have alleviated some travel burden to healthcare facilities, reduced cost for the care they receive, and improved chronic disease management².

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicare, Medicaid, and private payors have expanded reimbursement parity for both video and audio telehealth visits, aligning them with in person visits². Although these changes have improved access in rural communities, additional challenges remain, including the need for improved broadband infrastructure and addressing the provider shortage.

If passed, HB0869, would sustain progress by ensuring coverage and reimbursement for both video and audio telehealth visits, while efforts to improve broadband access and address provider shortages continue.

For these reasons, MRHA urges for your support on HB0689.

On Behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,

Alexis Garcia, Legislative and Policy Intern

1. National Rural Health Association. NRHA Telehealth & Broadband Advocacy | National Rural Health Association - NRHA | NRHA. National Rural Health. <https://www.ruralhealth.us/advocacy/advocacy-priority-areas/telehealth-broadband>
2. National Rural Health Association. *Impacts of Telehealth on Rural Health Care Access.*; 2024:1-3. <https://www.ruralhealth.us/nationalruralhealth/media/documents/nrha-impact-of-telehealth-policy-on-rural-health-access-2024.pdf>