



Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood Maryland Team

Committee: Health and Government Operations Committee

Testimony on: HB0551 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance – Coverage and Reimbursement of Telehealth Services

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 10, 2021

Bill Contact: Delegate Heather Bagnall

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a wide range of communities in Montgomery and Frederick Counties, from Bethesda near the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep its members healthy and safe in a clean environment and which promote equity across all of our diverse communities. Affordable and accessible health care, including mental health care, for all Marylanders is a primary focus for DTMG. We strongly support HB0551 because of its focus on expanding access to services and treatment for everyone with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

The pandemic has created a huge need for services for mental health and substance abuse disorders, above and beyond what was needed previously. Telehealth is an important innovation in meeting the increased need for those services and in facilitating access to services for consumers. According to a survey by the Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland, more than 70% of patients would continue using telehealth at least half the time after the pandemic because of:

- Appointment flexibility (61%)
- Decreased travel time (49%)
- Lack of transportation (39%)
- Physical disability (25%)
- Preference (16%)
- Childcare needs (15%)

HB0551 will ensure that telehealth can remain an option for patients – particularly the most vulnerable members of our communities -- who need treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders but have difficulty getting to in-person appointments in clinic or hospital settings. SB00393 will also ensure that primary care providers of these essential services have incentives to continue providing telehealth services by making sure they are reimbursed by Medicaid and private insurers at the same rate as for in-person visits.

Importantly, HB0551 also protects patients by making sure that they can select the manner in which a health care service is delivered, and they cannot be required to use telehealth in lieu of in–

person service delivery if they do not want to. HB0551 also mandates that telehealth services satisfy health insurance network access standards if the telehealth appointment is clinically appropriate, available, accessible, and the insured patient elects to use telehealth.

Maryland's laws need to be updated now to reflect the changed environment, technological advances, and the preferences of its residents. Telehealth has been essential for delivering treatment for mental health and substance use disorders during the pandemic and will continue to be after the pandemic. It is therefore essential that Medicaid and private health Insurance coverage for behavioral health services include telehealth as a coverable option and that payments for telehealth services for mental health and substance abuse be at the same level as they are for in-person services. Patients must be given the choice to use telehealth for mental health and substance abuse services, and to consent before using the telehealth service as their option. Telehealth services must also comply with the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Act, meaning reimbursement and utilization management must be comparable to services for other health conditions. Passage of HB0551 will accomplish these goals.

For all these reasons, DTMG strongly supports HB0551 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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