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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Senate Bill 3 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021 And Senate Bill 393 -- Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Coverage and Reimbursement of Telehealth Services

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Finance Committee January 27, 2021

SUPPORT

Background: Senate Bills 3 and 393 (SB3 and SB393) would help countless low income, disabled, and older Marylanders by expanding access to telehealth services. Currently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, several state restrictions on telehealth have been lifted. These bills would make those changes permanent, including expanding access to audio-only telehealth for Medicaid and commercial insurance plans, prohibiting Medicaid from limiting the delivery of telehealth based on the location of the client, and requiring private insurance plans to reimburse providers for telehealth services at the same rate as in-office care. In addition to these changes, SB393 includes three additional provisions. It would cover behavioral health and substance use treatment by peers and paraprofessionals, two key professional sectors of the mental health workforce. Second, this bill protects consumer choice, meaning a patient can choose between a telehealth and an in-person visit, and not be forced between one or the other. The final provision applies to Medicaid recipients, and provides that telehealth visits are reimbursed at the same rate as in-person visits.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies and programs, including Jewish Community Services (JCS). JCS provides critical social services, including mental and behavioral health therapy, older adult care, and disabilities support. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic telehealth executive orders, JCS has continued to provide services to its clients. Specifically, the audio-only telehealth allowance has enabled the neediest clients, including those with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals without stable internet access to receive their much-needed services. SB3 and SB393 would allow these clients to continue to receive telehealth services after the pandemic is over. JCS has learned how invaluable telehealth services are to their clients, allowing clients to not have to rely on family, friends, Mobility and other public transit options to get them to their appointments. Telehealth services save time, money and stress and makes services more accessible for many clients.

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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Member of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs

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For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB3 and SB393, with a preference for SB393 due to its additional provisions.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.