



**DATE:** February 10, 2021                      **COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations  
**BILL NO:** House Bill 551  
**BILL TITLE:** Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance – Coverage and Reimbursement of Telehealth Services  
**POSITION:** Support

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports House Bill 551 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance – Coverage and Reimbursement of Telehealth Services**

**Bill Summary:**

House Bill 551 requires Medicaid to provide health services appropriately delivered through telehealth to program recipients regardless of their location at the time of services provided; and to allow a “distant site provider” to provide healthcare services to a recipient from any location at which the services may be delivered through telehealth. Additionally, this bill expands the definition of telehealth for both Medicaid and private insurers to include synchronous interactions, audio-only delivery, store and forward communications, and remote patient monitoring services.

**Background:**

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger’s services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

**Medicaid Services:** Kennedy Krieger serves approximately 25,000 families per year, of whom a third are Medicaid recipients.

**Telehealth Services:** Kennedy Krieger Telehealth services include education, consultation, diagnosis, and direct in-home treatments. Kennedy Krieger has provided telebehavioral health services to military families through TRICARE since 2016. Prior to the pandemic, Kennedy Krieger’s 18 telehealth providers delivered approximately 11 telehealth sessions per week. Since March 15<sup>th</sup>, our telehealth providers have grown in number to 585, and we have delivered over 72,000 telehealth appointments (approximately 4,000 per week).

In April, Kennedy Krieger was the proud recipient of a \$994,950 grant from the Federal Communications Commission to expand and improve our telehealth services. Kennedy Krieger deployed this money by creating a loan program, loaning iPads, Chromebook, hotspots and other technology to our patients and providers.

**Rationale:**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has accelerated the use of telehealth and highlighted its many benefits. Emergency waivers from the federal and state government have removed barriers that previously limited access and these efforts must continue beyond the pandemic. The behavioral and mental health effects of the enormous challenges and disruptions of this past year, and continuing into the present time, will outlive the pandemic with enduring adverse consequences for many Marylanders. We must continue to make healthcare more accessible, particularly for those who have historically experienced barriers to care.

Telehealth increases access to care, makes services more accessible for families, and reduces travel time and expenses. Telehealth also allows therapists to see the child and family in the home setting, where the majority of the problems occur. Telehealth has provided a vehicle to deliver high quality services during the pandemic to Maryland families who otherwise would have no access to care.

In-home telehealth services are feasible, safe, efficient, and effective, and they allow families across the state access to the highest quality of services and providers available. Patients should be able to receive care where they need it.

Providers should receive the same reimbursement for their services, whether delivered in person or via telehealth. Reimbursement parity is a necessary component for the future of telehealth.

**Evidence-Based Outcomes To Date (based on over 72,000 telehealth sessions):**

Kennedy Krieger released a Patient Experience Survey to evaluate our delivery of telehealth between March to May 2020. Telehealth was provided across all disciplines including psychology, physical therapy, speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, medical programs, and all mental and behavioral health services.

Over 2,000 self- or parent- reported survey responses were received. Parent and patient satisfaction was overwhelmingly high, with 94% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the telehealth platform was easy to use; 96% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt comfortable sharing information using telehealth; 95% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with the clinical services received via telehealth.

In a dramatically changing healthcare environment, telehealth is a necessary tool to have available to utilize beyond the pandemic. Those at most-risk cannot afford to have a delay in care, and rather, should have every opportunity to access their doctors and health plan. **Kennedy Krieger eagerly endorses the coverage and reimbursement of telehealth services through House Bill 551 and urges the committee to provide a favorable report.**