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HOUSE BILL 1287

Serenity Health urges a favorable opinion on HB 1287, to allow Alcohol and Drug Trainee (ADT) counselors to continue the provision of telehealth counseling after the current declared Public Health Emergency (PHE).

As essential healthcare providers, substance use disorder (SUD) programs with ADT counselors remained open during this pandemic, adding telehealth counseling to provide life-saving services. We have learned from experience that telehealth counseling is an essential and successful mode of behavioral health service delivery. Telehealth expands access and flexibility to receive counseling, improves treatment retention and reduces systemic barriers and stigma associated with counseling within brick and mortar facilities – all while increasing patient and community safety by allowing social distancing and self-quarantine.

I started this letter as a provider of services, but want to give my perspective as a patient receiving services during this pandemic. For 11 years I have suffered from neurological disorders that have led to multiple falls and surgeries, leaving me with emotional issues that I've never had before. Dealing with my latest fall and surgery left me emotionally DONE. As a provider of services, I have all the skills and resources in my "toolbox". As a human being – I couldn't do it. Reaching out to the systems of providers was overwhelming. I spent multiple hours on the phone with my insurance company trying to find a provider to help, but as a new patient it was next to impossible to find services. Three months of being borderline suicidal before I could get an appointment two months out is totally unacceptable for our behavioral health network. We must use whatever resource we have in our "toolbox" to open services to prevent any patient from not making it through these barriers to treatment.

I urge you as a patient accessing services, and a provider overwhelmed with increasing access during a global pandemic; give a favorable report for House Bill 1287.

Respectfully,

Nancy Turner, RN, MBR

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