



Date: March 15, 2021
To: Public Health and Insurance & Real Estate Committees
From: Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance
Re: H.B. 5596 An Act Concerning Telehealth and S.B. 1022 An Act Concerning Telehealth

Good morning Senator Lesser, Senator Abrams, Representative Wood, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato, Representative Petit and members of the Insurance & Real Estate and Public Health Committees:

My name is Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association of community nonprofits. Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving hundreds of thousands of people in need - and employing 117,000 people. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of H.B. 5596 and S.B. 1022, Acts Concerning Telehealth.**

Nonprofits are on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic, ensuring the continuity of community services to children, families and communities. Access to care has continued in large part due to temporary authorizations to allow for the expanded use of telehealth.

The telehealth related provisions implemented by Governor Lamont through Executive Order has provided people a chance to talk to providers without adding to crowds and risks in waiting rooms, eliminated transportation concerns for low-income and rural patients, and reduced staff exposure to the virus.

Because the authorization to provide telehealth services in Connecticut's Medicaid program came out the day before the state largely closed in March, most providers did not have telehealth infrastructure in place prior to the pandemic. They had to design a system overnight, including the purchasing of laptops, online security and privacy systems, virtual meeting platform licenses, issuance of smartphones to regular patients. These investments have been made at enormous expense, much of it unplanned, with promising results that suggest continuing to use these systems after reopening the state will lead to increased service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness.

The use of telehealth services will be important during the transition period during which in-person, site-based programs may be operational, but some families will continue to experience anxiety in meeting face-to-face. Telehealth services hold the possibility of long-term savings while reaching more people during and beyond the current pandemic.

We urge you to pass An Act Concerning Telehealth because it:

1. **Continues to pay for telehealth at the same rate as in-person visits and allows services to be delivered from any setting:** Payment should be based on the treatment provided, not the location of from where the service is provided. Telehealth has added costs to providers who are maintaining physical offices as well as paying costs for telehealth.
2. **Allows telephonic/audio only sessions:** This is important to ensuring access to care for people who do not have access to technology needed for video conferencing
3. **Allows the use any HIPAA compliant platform:** This allows providers to meet clients where they are, on platforms they are comfortable with and knowledgeable using.

Thank you for your time and consideration.