



Date: March 18, 2022
To: Insurance & Real Estate Committee
From: Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations, The Alliance
Re: H.B. 5450 An Act Concerning Telehealth

Good morning Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Senator Hwang, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato, and members of the Insurance & Real Estate Committee:

My name is Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations 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 115,000 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 on **H.B. 5450 An Act Concerning Telehealth**.

As you consider changes to Connecticut's telehealth statute, we call your attention to the fact that the provisions passed last year that ensure adequate reimbursement for telehealth services sunsets next year. We encourage you to eliminate this sunset and keep the protections for providers passed by the legislature forever.

Secondly, we are appreciative of the language in Section 5 of the bill, which would, outside of the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact, require telehealth providers have a physical presence in Connecticut. While telehealth is an important advancement in service delivery for behavioral health, we are concerned the widespread use of telehealth companies located outside of Connecticut will be detrimental to people seeking mental health treatment. As we emerge from the pandemic, it's important to recognize that sometimes people receiving mental health treatment will need to see a provider in person, even if they choose to receive most of their services through telehealth. The requirement in Section 4 would preserve the continuity of care.

As background, community nonprofits have been on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic, ensuring the continuity of community services to children, families and communities. Because the authorization to provide telehealth services in Connecticut's Medicaid program came out the day before the state largely closed two years ago, 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 will lead to increased service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness.

While services are now available in person again, telehealth continues to be an option many people want to use to receive behavioral health treatment. For nonprofit providers, it has helped them connect with more families, especially those who have childcare or transportation barriers that make it hard to receive treatment in person.

Thank you for your time and consideration.