

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community
Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
NorDx
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Synernet
Waldo County General Hospital
Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable
Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health
New England Rehabilitation
Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Jasmine Bishop, MaineHealth Statement of Support for Telehealth Expansion Thursday, May 6, 2021

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Jasmine Bishop, Director of Telehealth at MaineHealth, and I am here today to testify in strong support of expanding coverage and maintaining payment parity for telehealth, including video visits and audio-only visits, and telemonitoring services because it will help increase access to healthcare for rural Mainers.

My testimony today generally addresses each of the bills you will hear today, but I would first like to say that we are grateful that the Administration has been proactive in supporting telehealth through MaineCare and requirements on commercial health plans during the pandemic. Because of the flexibilities provided, we have learned an incredible amount about telehealth and what works best for our patients and their clinical needs, and our position on these bills reflects those learnings.

Since the start of the Public Health Emergency, MaineHealth has conducted more than 200,000 video visits to patients' homes. MaineHealth has also conducted over 100,000 phone visits. While we always seek to offer video visits when possible, we acknowledge there are many cases in which a patient may need a phone visit including: patients without access to adequate broadband to support the significant data required for video, patients without significant resources to afford an adequate data plan, and patients without the necessary video-enabled devices. In a telehealth patient survey completed yesterday, May 5th, a patient wrote "The WIFI where I was wasn't great, so we finished the appointment on the phone." This patient was seeing a provider in Portland – access issues occur throughout our state. Back in January, a patient stated simply in their survey response "the phone call visit gave me the information I needed." When we segment services based on patient resources we decrease the access to care for patients without adequate resources and increase the digital divide. Moreover, telehealth is sometimes the only way to reach patients who would not have otherwise come into the clinic setting; this can be particularly true for behavioral health patients.

As a health care system with all eligible hospitals receiving Leapfrog A Safety Ratings or Best Rural Hospital designations, we are committed to ensuring quality of care in all interactions with our patients. Telehealth is simply another means of providing care, but the standards should not change based on the medium through/by which the care is delivered. Licensure protects patients whether the provider is in person or in another state. A patient who receives telehealth from a provider in Maine should expect that the same quality and

oversight standards apply as if the visit was in person. Licensure governs that oversight.

In order to maintain equitable access to all patients and consistent quality across the MaineHealth service offerings, the telehealth offerings must be reimbursed at the same rate as the equivalent in-person visit. Payment parity acknowledges this equivalent level of care is being achieved and the need for the health system to keep open every physical location when an escalation of care is required.

Our providers and patients have reported great success from the expanded use of telehealth during the pandemic and we expect that telehealth will be used long after the Public Health Emergency ends. With that said, we urge the Legislature to support expanding coverage and maintaining payment parity for telehealth.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.