



## **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1022: An Act Concerning Telehealth**

**Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut**

**March 15, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut in support of Senate Bill 1022: An Act Concerning Telehealth.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut envisions a health system that is accountable and responsive to the people it serves, that supports our health, takes excellent care of all of us when we are sick at a cost that doesn't threaten our financial security. A responsive health system finds new and innovative ways to provide access to care – like telehealth.

One of our policy priorities during this pandemic is to ensure access to coverage and care during this time. We are testifying in support of this proposal because telehealth is a critical point of access to the health care system for many.

Amid this pandemic, telehealth has proven to be an important part of the health care delivery system, as many people want to avoid going out in public and to the doctor or may have transportation challenges. Telehealth has helped many retain access to the health care system, even as this pandemic goes on, as well as helped providers continue to deliver care and bring in revenue. We applaud the legislature for taking up this important aspect of access to care.

We support including telephone only (audio only) telehealth, both for Medicaid and in-network providers (for those with private health insurance). Access to both the internet and a device able to conduct telehealth visits via video may be a challenge for many during this pandemic, including and especially low-income people or those struggling with recent job loss. A telephone may be the only reliable form of communication some people have to conduct telehealth visits – they should not be shut out from access.

It should be noted, though, that even telephone only (audio only) telehealth is not necessarily accessible to all – some people may have limitations on the minutes of their phone and be unable to use their phone for this purpose. It is important to retain the ability to see a doctor in person, as telehealth may not be the best way to access health care for everyone.

We are happy to see that payment parity for telehealth is included in the bill language. It is important that providers be compensated for telehealth visits as they would for an in-person visit. Many of the elements of a visit remain the same via telehealth, except the

mode of communication. Insurance carriers should not reduce the reimbursement amount to providers just because a visit was conducted via telehealth.

The provision to prohibit the charge of facility fees for telehealth is also favorable – and makes sense, as the patient does not utilize the facility for a telehealth visit. While the doctor may use their own office for telehealth visits, we still agree that a facility fee is inappropriate for telehealth visits.

We are pleased to note that dentists are included in the definition of telehealth provider. Dental care is so often left out of consideration of health care.

Telehealth has shown itself to be a critical point of access for many patients, whether there is a pandemic or not. We urge you to pass this proposal, to ensure that the innovations in telehealth that have taken place during the pandemic continue to benefit those who need it, after the crisis is over.

Thank you for your time.

*Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut's mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a democratic health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable, equitable health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice.*