



March 15, 2021

Senator Matt Lesser, Chair
Representative Kerry Wood, Chair
Senator Tony Hwang, Ranking Member
Representative Cara Pavalock-D'Amato, Ranking Member
Insurance and Real Estate Committee

Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams, Chair
Representative Jonathan Steinberg, Chair
Senator Heather Somers, Ranking Member
Senator Tony Hwang, Ranking Member
Representative William Petit, Ranking Member
Public Health Committee

Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairs, Co-Chairs, Ranking Members and Members of the Insurance and Real Estate and Public Health Committees:

My name is Rebecca Ruitto, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Chair of the Connecticut Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CTAMFT). I am writing in support of SB1022, An Act Concerning Telehealth. CTAMFT currently represents over 1,000 Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) throughout Connecticut and countless residents seeking mental health care.

The virus and the declaration of the public health emergency declared by Governor Lamont last year has greatly altered the state's mental health care system. It is anticipated that mental health needs will continue to increase in the wake of the public health crisis. Tele-health has become a very important tool for mental health providers throughout the pandemic, and it is critically important that it remains available permanently. Our providers have gone above and beyond to remain accessible to their patients, and SB1022 would allow us to ensure enough providers remain available for patients in need.

Current telehealth provisions have allowed providers to continue to serve patients and engage new patients who have not received care in the past. Telehealth has expanded care to those patients who frequently experience barriers in attending therapy including transportation, work hours and family obliga-

tions. Increased access to services allows patients to receive more consistent care, and improved mental health.

SB 1022 affords private insurance market payment parity. Payment parity is an important component to telehealth legislation, providers are still providing the same top quality care whether it be through telehealth or in-person services. It is appropriate that payment rates be based on treatment and not the location the treatment is taking place. Additionally, our providers have invested in various additional expenses in order to ensure that telehealth is provided under best practice and through appropriate HIPAA compliant platforms.

Payment parity also continues to ensure an appropriate number of providers are available to provide care to those using insurance. When lower rates are used for teletherapy, providers are less likely to accept those insurers with the lower rates for the same quality work. This is a trend we are already starting to see in providers, and with the impending increase in mental health needs, will create additional stressors on the mental health system if continued. In order to maintain enough providers to meet the needs, it is clear we need to support providers through payment parity.

SB 1022 also allows mental health providers to use their own selected platform in delivering telehealth services. Some insurance carriers require the use of a specific platform when seeking reimbursement for services. However many of our members have already invested in various HIPAA compliant platforms and our patient population is as diverse as their insurance coverage and carrier. Requiring providers to use a carrier-specific platform places an undue burden, and is not practical for providers seeing clients under a variety of different insurance carriers. I ask that you allow providers to select their own platform that best meets their needs as well as the clients they are serving.

Thank you for your time and attention to these important matters. I support SB 1022 and urge you pass the bill out of your respective Committees. I also urge you to continue to include the payment parity provisions and allow the use of any HIPAA compliant platform selected by mental health providers in Connecticut as the proposal moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Ruitto, LMFT

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CTAMFT Chair