



February 22nd, 2021

Representative Catherine Abercrombie, Chair
Senator Marilyn Moore, Chair
Senator Eric Berthel, Ranking Member
Representative Jay Case, Ranking Member
Human Services Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2000
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairwomen Abercrombie and Moore, Ranking Members Berthel and Case and Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Rebecca Ruitto, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Chair of the Connecticut Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CTAMFT). I currently reside in Portland, CT and am submitting testimony in support of HB 6472: An Act Concerning Telehealth.

CTAMFT currently serves over 1,000 Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) in the state of Connecticut. CTAMFT also works to make sure patients in Connecticut receive access to the mental health services they need.

COVID-19 has created drastic changes for Connecticut residents, including increased mental health symptoms and diagnosis requiring them to seek support from therapists and other health providers. Connecticut responded in supportive ways, with our Governor creating executive orders allowing for necessary changes to be made to allow these services to be rendered. I am now asking you, as the committee to further these efforts and keep this critical access open to residents.

Clients have had more flexibility in accessing care and increased ability to attend all sessions, both of which are elements of successful treatment and positive mental health progress. Additionally, we are seeing more and more research support further mental health crises to come

even after the pandemic ends, with uncertainty as to exactly how long these crises will last. Access to care for residents should continue to remain as easy as possible.

CTAMFT recognizes that telehealth may not always be the best fit for all clients or therapists to use. However, we have seen our MFTs continue to use HIPAA compliant software and continuing to provide Telehealth services at the highest ethical levels; exactly as they would perform in-person sessions. CTAMFT encourages providers to use best practice and to adhere to ethical guidelines whenever treating patients. CTAMFT encourages the decision for a client to be seen in the office versus telehealth to be a decision made between therapist and client based on clinical need and on an individual basis. Supporting this telehealth bill, would ensure this decision is made between therapists and clients, a best practice for creating both therapeutic alliances and care to our residents. Best care practices such as this would lead to more positive mental health outcomes for Connecticut residents.

Additionally, as technology continues to influence medical professions, more and more residents will be seeking telehealth services across all levels of care (physical and mental). It is for these reasons CTAMFT is recommending that telehealth be a permanent resource without a sunset date. To remove the sunset date would allow Connecticut to be progressive in reaching needs of residents without further legislative action to be taken after just a short period of time. Should a sunset date be determined, CTAMFT recommends it be no earlier than June 30, 2023 to allow for time during the legislative session for extending sunset or making it permanent.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I again urge you to support HB 6472 with permanency to allow this to have the biggest positive impact on both providers and residents of Connecticut alike. Please feel free to contact me at chair@ctamft.org if you need additional information or have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L Ruitto, LMFT

Rebecca L Ruitto, LMFT
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
Chair, CTAMFT