



February 11th, 2021

Representative Jonathan Steinberg
Legislative Office Building, Room 3004
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Senator Mary Abrams
Legislative Office Building, Room 3000
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Cc: The Connecticut Public Health Committee

Dear Representative Steinberg and Senator Abrams,

As Chair of the Connecticut Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CTAMFT), a component of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), I am writing to request your support in keeping telehealth behavioral health services available to Connecticut residents. I am asking that you extend the provisions in HB 6001, to continue to accommodate needs of Connecticut residents during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Currently these provisions will expire on March 15th, 2021.

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

Telehealth continues to play a vital role in ensuring therapists are able to provide services during this declared health emergency. Marriage and Family Therapists are reporting increases in client caseloads due to increased stressors and mental health needs exacerbated by the pandemic. Telehealth has been a way for these therapists to provide much needed services in a safe manner. With the anticipation of mental health needs continuing to increase as the pandemic continues long-term; it is important that patients continue to have uninterrupted access to tele-therapy.

The vaccine has provided hope in this pandemic, however Connecticut will not be at herd immunity by the March 15th deadline and teletherapy needs to continue to be an accessible service. Services provided over telehealth are equal in quality and effectiveness as those provided in the office. Some clients have found it easier to attend more consistent sessions through telehealth, leading to faster mental health improvement, and have opened up more appointments for new patients seeking services.

Overhead costs for providers have increased to ensure the use of HIPAA compliant platforms/ software and other tools to help provide services through technology. Additionally, many therapists are unable to return fully to in-person sessions either due to their own or family risk levels or the ability to safely clean therapy spaces between patients. HB 6001 created a solution to these barriers and has allowed both Connecticut residents to have their mental health needs met and for providers to serve needs while being reimbursed fairly.

If no action is taken to make HB 6001 permanent, patient risk levels dramatically increase. With the expiration of this bill, insurance providers will be allowed to reimburse providers at lower rates and mandate specific platforms, which also provide lower reimbursement.

CTAMFT supports best practices and believes that providers should be utilizing HIPAA compliant telehealth software. However, the decision on whether a client should be seen in the office or through teletherapy and the platform used is a decision best determined by the therapist and client, not insurance companies.

I respectfully ask that you pass legislation to permanently extend the telehealth provisions of HB 6001 before the sunset date of March 15, 2021. I appreciate your help in ensuring the well-being of Connecticut residents and providing access to mental health care. Thank you for your consideration, I can be reached at at chair@ctamft.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Ruitto, LMFT
Rebecca L. Ruitto, LMFT
CTAMFT Chair