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House Bill 869 Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2025
Health and Government Operations Committee
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Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 869.

HB 869 repeals the sunset on important provisions that ensure the availability of audio-only telehealth services and telehealth reimbursement rates that are on par with services delivered in person.

As Maryland works to tackle a persistent behavioral health workforce shortage and address an increasing demand for quality mental health and substance use care, we must ensure that successful strategies which are currently expanding access to care do not lapse. Telehealth is an invaluable care delivery tool that promotes health equity for those living in vulnerable and underserved communities and helps to address gaps in care by extending access to patients who would either have to forgo needed care or travel long distances to receive it.

Audio-only telehealth is vital. Many Marylanders lack the financial means to purchase smart phones or other video technology and the data plans to support them. Others live in rural areas where broadband coverage is spotty at best. Without ongoing support through audio-only telehealth these individuals will face great difficulty in accessing needed behavioral health care.

Likewise, rate parity between services provided through telehealth and those conducted in-person is critically important. The use of telehealth helps behavioral health providers allocate scarce resources to best meet the increased demand for behavioral health care. Allowing lower rates for the use of telehealth in the middle of a behavioral health workforce crisis would jeopardize providers' ability to maintain already stretched staff and likely cause those providers to eliminate telehealth as an option.

In an [October 2024](#) report by the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC)¹ conducted pursuant to legislation the General Assembly passed in 2023 (SB 534/HB 1148), MHCC recommends allowing unrestricted use of audio-only telehealth for behavioral health services, stating that it expands access, increases equity, maintains continuity of care and supports patient choice. The report also recommends the continuation of payment parity for telehealth and in-person services to ensure that telehealth options remain practical for providers.

Telehealth has become a critical component of Maryland's health care continuum. It is expanding access to care and improving health equity across the state. For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 869 and urges a favorable report.

¹ Maryland Health Care Commission. *Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2023 / Behavioral Health Care – Treatment and Access Act: Telehealth Recommendations*. October 17, 2024. https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit_telemedicine/documents/telehealth_rec_rpt.pdf

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