

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5596

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH.

Vote Date: 3/19/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/15/2021

File No.: 256

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) to conduct a study into the benefits and implications of expanding telehealth services in the state. It requires the DPH to submit a report to the committee of cognizance by January 1, 2022.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH, Acting Commissioner, Department of Public Health (DPH):

The DPH opposes this bill because they do not think a study to expand telehealth services in the state is necessary. DPH feels that enough research has been completed by national organizations, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to guide the General Assembly in making telehealth related decisions.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Adam Marchand, UNITE HERE Local 34:

Mr. Marchand and the UNITE HERE Local 34 supports this bill because they want the proposed study to include the voices of patients and other clinical staff members. They reference a telehealth study done by UCONN Health and delivered to the Office of Health Strategy (OHS) that outlined several challenges with telehealth delivery and concerns about quality of care from both providers and patients. The study also addresses significant patient accessibility issues that need to be addressed before telehealth becomes standard operating procedure in the state.

Sara LeMaster, MPAP, Manager of Government Relations and Public Policy, Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT):

Ms. LeMaster and the CHCACT supports this bill because they have anecdotal and preliminary study data to support continued and permanent use of telehealth options. They report increased patient access, improved quality of care, and more satisfied patient experiences while being able to deliver access and improved outcomes for even the most underserved in their communities.

Samantha Lew, MSW, Policy Analyst and Advocacy Specialist, Health Equity Solutions (HES):

Ms. Lew and the HES supports this bill because they see the challenges faced when health care systems are not designed with equitable access and care in mind. HES states that systemic racism disproportionately impacts Black and Latino residents across the state. This includes unintentionally limiting access to telehealth care due to issues with housing, family size, and privacy issues. HES also have concerns about language and technological barriers preventing equitable access to telehealth services if additional study is not completed before making legislative decisions regarding telehealth.

Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Organizing, Planned Parenthood Southern New England (PPSNE):

Ms. Raffa and the PPSNE supports this bill because the pandemic has shown that people need more healthcare. Telehealth is a critical component in expanding care and yet the increased access to healthcare over the past year has not addressed the significant number of inequities and obstacles faced by many in the state. Telehealth access and coverage will not be enough to address the inequities in our healthcare system and additional study and attention needs to be made to address these concerns.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Kathy Flaherty, Executive Director, Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP):

Ms. Flaherty and the CLRP do not support a telehealth study conducted by DPH. They feel that the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA), the Insurance Department (CID), or the Office of Health Strategy (OHS) are the appropriate and relevant agencies to conduct a study into the benefits and implications of telehealth.

Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Staff Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA):

Ms. Weir and the GHLA do not support this bill requiring a study before telehealth becomes a permanent healthcare delivery option. GHLA wants the legislature to make telehealth a permanent option via the legislative process this session.

Reported by: Kate Hamilton

Date: April 12, 2021