



Testimony of Matthew Farr, MS, PT
Vice President of Ambulatory Operations for Connecticut Children's Specialty Group
to the Public Health Committee
Regarding Senate Bill 1176, *An Act Concerning Telehealth*

March 6, 2023

Senator Lesser, Representative Gilcrest, and members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding House Bill 6562, An Act Concerning Telehealth.

My name is Matthew Farr, and I serve as the Vice President of Ambulatory Operations for Connecticut Children's Specialty Group. In my role, I am responsible for the successful operations of Connecticut Children's ambulatory network to ensure safe and efficient patient care. I am submitting testimony in support of the permanent telehealth coverage provided in this legislation and would further encourage state leaders to pursue facilitation of Connecticut providers seeing patients via telemedicine in other states.

Before commenting on the bill, I wish to share some background on our organization. Connecticut Children's is a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 2,800 employees, more than 1,300 on our medical staff, and locations spread across our region, we are Connecticut's only independent children's health system.

At Connecticut Children's, we have implemented virtual health capabilities across our health system for children needing primary care, specialty care and hospital services. We have found that telemedicine is an invaluable tool to ensure safe access to care, and continuity of care for our patients during the height of the pandemic and currently. Looking to the future, we expect telemedicine will continue to be an important tool to promote children's access to needed care.

Telehealth helps bring the unique pediatric expertise of Connecticut Children's physicians to kids in every corner of the state, kids in urban and rural settings, and kids whose families lack access to reliable transportation. Our use of telehealth services will help improve children's access to high-quality pediatric health care, no matter their zip code or household income level. At Connecticut Children's, we treat many kids with complex medical conditions and immunodeficiencies. For many patients, traveling outside of the home for medical appointments is an immense physical and oftentimes emotional challenge any time of year, not just during the pandemic. Allowing more visits to be conducted virtually is significantly easier and safer for many patients and can also be more effective for treating children with behavioral challenges who may be unhappy or uncomfortable in a medical setting.

In its recent "Position Statement on Telehealth" co-authored by Connecticut Children's Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician Dr. Rob Keder, the Society for Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics shares patient vignettes which illustrate how telemedicine can help provide care for young patients. Here's just one case example:

*A teenage girl with intellectual disability and severe disruptive behaviors sees a DBP [Developmental-Behavioral Pediatric] physician for medication management. Each time she comes to the office, she is overwhelmed and distressed by the medical environment and disruption to her daily schedule. This leads to instances of physical aggression with her family members and attempts to elope the clinic, and at least 2 visits had to be abandoned. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she completed a telehealth visit from home, which the family found more successful because they were not distracted by their daughter's behaviors, allowing the clinician to make naturalistic observations and the family to participate in shared decision regarding medications.*¹

Additionally, we know that a child's health is determined by a myriad of factors, most of which occur outside of the traditional healthcare setting and are often referred to as the "social determinants of health." Factors like lack of access to reliable transportation and an unpredictable job schedule for parents can sometimes make it challenging for families to make it to every in-person appointment on-time. Allowing for appointments to be conducted via telemedicine, when appropriate, can help families better adhere their children's care plans and help prevent missed appointments that may lead to poorer health outcomes. To that end, we appreciate that this proposal includes coverage for audio-only appointment, as we know there are families who lack access to reliable internet service.

Permanent telemedicine coverage and payment parity allows providers the assurance they need to invest in telehealth infrastructure with confidence versus patchwork temporary solutions and spur the kind of development that will lead to the next generation of patient access solutions.

As drafted, this proposed legislation creates provisions allowing out-of-state providers to practice telemedicine in Connecticut and received Medicaid reimbursement but it does not facilitate Connecticut providers seeing patients via telemedicine in other states. Critical to ensuring continuity of care for Connecticut patients is true license reciprocity with all States participating in inter-State licensure. As an example, this would facilitate a recent high school graduate attending college out-of-state to continue to receive care from their regular CT-based provider, with whom they have built a relationship, trust, and a care plan over the years.

Furthermore, as we consider the future for pediatrics, we know that telemedicine has an important role to play. Connecticut Children's looks forward to partnering with the state to find innovative solutions to improve health outcomes for children, including integration of telemedicine in schools and other appropriate community settings.

Thank you for your consideration of this position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee, Connecticut Children's Government Relations Associate at eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org.

¹ Keder RD, Mittal S, Stringer K, Wallis KE, Wallace JE, Soares NS. Society for Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics Position Statement on Telehealth. J Dev Behav Pediatr. 2022 Jan 1;43(1):55-59. doi: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000001046. PMID: 34855691.

