

January 20, 2020

RE: Support of SB 278 - State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – Maryland School-based Health Center Standards - Telehealth

Dear Chair Pinsky:

Our organizations are in full support of *Senate Bill 278/House Bill 34– State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – Maryland School-Based Health Center Standards – Telehealth*. The bill eliminates an outdated and unnecessary approval process for school-based health centers to provide telehealth. In doing so, the bill supports the provision of telehealth as a strategy to improve health and educational outcomes for students served by school-based health centers.

This legislation is critical for the following reasons:

- **More Support is Needed for Telehealth in School-Based Health Centers:** Out of the 86 school-based health centers in Maryland, only about 18 centers are approved by MSDE to provide services through telehealth - even during the crisis of COVID-19. SBHCs are under-resourced and face significant administrative barriers in establishing telehealth programs.
- **MSDE Approval Process is No Longer Necessary:** With SB 402/HB 448 of the 2020 session, the Maryland General Assembly established uniform standards for health care providers to offer telehealth across all types of settings. MSDE’s process for reviewing and approving school-based health center to provide telehealth is no longer necessary.
- **Telehealth is Necessary During COVID Crisis:** During this public health emergency, telehealth is the single most important strategy in ensuring people have access to care. It is also has been the only means for some health care providers to monitor children for crises in the home. However, most school-based health centers have been unable to pivot to telehealth because of MSDE’s restrictions. School-based health centers are located in communities with a high concentration of poverty, and these communities have been most impacted by the pandemic. For this reason, SB 278/HB 34 is emergency legislation.

- **Telehealth is Critical Beyond the Pandemic for School-Based Health Centers:** School-based health centers mission is to improve health outcomes and ensure students can stay in school. If students are out with a somatic or behavioral health illness, telehealth provides a critical tool for a health care practitioner to engage the student and support their return to school.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We ask for a favorable report of this emergency legislation. If any of our organizations can be helpful with more information about this issue, please contact us directly or send a message through Robyn who represents the Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care. Her contact information is relliott@policypartners.net.

Advocates for Children and Youth

Maryland Dental Action Coalition

American Telehealth Association

Maryland Hospital Association

Center for Hope

Maryland Nurses Association

Licensed Professional Counselors of Maryland

Mental Health Association of Maryland

Johns Hopkins University and Medicine

National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter

Maryland Academy of Advanced Practice Clinicians

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence – Maryland Chapter

Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care

Preventing Abuse and Neglect through Dental Awareness

Maryland Community Health System

Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland