

April 28th, 2021

Dear Chair Deb Patterson, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare,

My name is Tessalyn Morrison and I'm a resident of Portland, Oregon. I'm writing today to testify in support of House Bill 2508, because Oregonians like me need full coverage of telehealth services. HB 2508 comprehensively updates Oregon's telehealth statutes for physical, behavioral, and oral health and outlines coverage requirements for public and private insurance. HB 2508 clarifies that telemedicine services— both audio-only and video conferencing—should be covered and reimbursed at the same scope and level as in-person visits. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth has proven to be an essential means of accessing healthcare that we need to expand through continued state investment.

I have spent my third year of medical school at OHSU doing quite a few telemedicine visits in all types of primary and specialty care clinics. There are some visits that will never be replaced by telehealth, but many visits, especially for follow-up care can and should be done via telehealth throughout and beyond the pandemic. Telemedicine expands access to rural healthcare: in 2018, an estimated 79 million Americans in rural and urban areas lived in federally designated primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas. Oregon is a rural state with very few large, specialty centers, where people and families spend many hours driving for healthcare when they do not always need to.

Health care centers, even OHSU, have taken large financial hits during the pandemic. OHSU students were able to counter a >5% rise in tuition for new students due to the financial burden of COVID. We need to reimburse equally for telehealth visits to get through the pandemic and continue to provide convenient, high quality care.

Since the pandemic started, Delaware, Colorado, Vermont, Maryland, Maine, and other states have already enacted comprehensive telemedicine legislation. With HB 2508, Oregon has the chance to join these states in passing proactive, future-looking legislation that will take crucial steps toward addressing a serious access issue impacting Oregonians across the state.

Thank you for your consideration,
Tessalyn Morrison, MPH, 3rd year medical student at OHSU
Portland, Oregon