

April 28th, 2021

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

My name is Cecil Michaux and I'm a resident of Salem, Oregon. I'm writing today to testify in support of House Bill 2508, because Oregonians like me need full coverage of telehealth services. HB 2508A comprehensively updates Oregon's telehealth statutes for physical, behavioral, and oral health and outlines coverage requirements for public and private insurance. HB 2508A 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.

Being able to access telehealth since lockdown has been invaluable to my mental health. I have been seeing my therapist since March 2020 via telehealth, and this January we decided that we no longer needed to continue weekly visits, as my mental health had improved significantly- to the point that we no longer had enough to talk about. Now I am continuing to check in with him every couple months to make sure I remain on track and healthy, and telehealth allows me a lot of flexibility in when and where I can attend these appointments, which lowers barriers for me to access the care I need. In the fall I will be traveling across the country to start college, but I will be able to check in with a therapist I have an established, trusting relationship with because of telehealth.

Since March I have been able to start hormonal gender transition and an anxiety medication, to which I credit most of my recovery. The appointments I needed to discuss these medications with my doctor were all over telehealth. Because of telehealth, I was able to start the medications that have significantly improved my quality of life, even during a pandemic. And if I need to speak with the gender clinic in Portland to receive specialized care, they will be just a phone appointment away. Access to telehealth services changed my life during the pandemic, and they have proven valuable in ways that I will continue to need as the crisis abates with growing vaccination.

Since the pandemic started, Delaware, Colorado, Vermont, Maryland, Maine, and other states have already enacted comprehensive telemedicine legislation. With HB 2508A, 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,
Cecil Michaux
Salem, OR