

April 28th, 2021

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

My name is Killian Lynch and I'm a resident of Forest Grove, 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.

As a full-time student juggling a job and a practicum on top of looking after my health and mental illness, being able to access my providers when I need them is godsend. Needless to say, I was especially grateful to be able to safely access mental health care while isolated in the midst of a global crisis. Telehealth made it possible for me to be safe, but it was my insurance that ultimately provided that access.

Last spring was chaotic for us all, and my life was no exception. I could not have accomplished all that I have these last 13 months had my insurance not reimbursed those counselling appointments. Thanks to those appointments, I was referred to a Portland-based professional, whom I would have never even considered hiring if I didn't think they'd offer telehealth and I wasn't sure my insurance would cover it. Accessing their care has transformed my health management for the better, which is why I urge you to vote House Bill 2508. I can't overstate the impact this pandemic has had on Oregonians. I know this to be true as a Public Health student and as an Oregonian myself. I have been uniquely lucky as a result of the rapid changes forced upon us and all our systems but sadly, the opposite is true for so many.

It's important to mention that telephone-only appointments have been an essential tool in expanding access to telehealth for rural communities as well as for very low income, houseless, and elderly patients who are not able to utilize video technology. Many of these patients do not have video technology or reliable Internet service and/or may lack digital literacy. For these individuals, the issue is not a video-visit versus a phone-visit, but rather a phone appointment or no appointment at all. Additionally, they've been my only access to primary care in the last year.

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,  
Killian M. Lynch  
Forest Grove, OR