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October 13, 2015

The Honorable James T. Welch
Chair, Committee on Health Care Financing
Massachusetts State House, Room 309
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Jeffrey Sánchez
Chair, Committee on Health Care Financing
Massachusetts State House, Room 236
Boston, MA 02133

HB267 - An Act Advancing and Expanding Access to Telemedicine Services

Dear Chairman Welch and Chairman Sánchez:

On behalf of the Conference of Boston teaching Hospitals (COBTH) and its fourteen member hospitals I would like to express our strong support for passage of ***HB267 - An Act Advancing and Expanding Access to Telemedicine Services***. COBTH is pleased to be part of the Massachusetts Telemedicine Coalition - a group of sixteen organizations committed to advancing telemedicine in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts, thanks in part to your leadership and the work of this committee, has enacted landmark legislation in the areas of access, quality and, most recently, cost containment. To date, much of the cost-containment focus has been on how we pay for health care. However, the way in which we deliver health care is changing rapidly and offers real opportunity for containing costs while enhancing both access to and quality of care. One such area is telemedicine — the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another through electronic communications. Telemedicine includes a growing variety of applications and services using two-way video, email, smartphones, wireless tools and other forms of telecommunications technology to connect patients with their health care providers and exchange critical information.

Teaching hospitals, both nationally and here in Massachusetts, have led the way and have been on the forefront of telemedicine initiatives. A recent national study found that while adoption of telemedicine varies greatly by state and hospital, the teaching status of a hospital is an indicator of greater adoption of telemedicine.

While Massachusetts has taken some steps to enable the practice of telemedicine, much more needs to be done. In the past three years, the number of states enacting telemedicine "parity" laws such as HB267 has doubled. Unfortunately, Massachusetts is not one of the 25 states with such a parity law in place. By requiring parity, patients and clinicians would be provided with the flexibility to determine what method of care delivery works best for them and their unique needs.

Telemedicine has been shown to reduce the cost of health care and increase efficiency through better management of chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes and hypertension; shared health professional staffing; reduced travel times; increased patient satisfaction and fewer or shorter hospital stays.

Other benefits include:

- increased access to specialists and other providers in portions of the state where there may be shortages
- better patient outcomes because of timelier access to specialists
- reductions in unnecessary admissions or readmissions when through remote monitoring or remote consultations with clinicians, they are able to better manage their health situations while at home
- greater patient satisfaction due to greater flexibility, reduction or elimination of travel and waiting time and lost work or school
- avoidance of unnecessary transfers to other more costly facilities when a remote specialist can determine the patient's best care option

As we all look to ways to reduce costs and eliminate inefficiencies in our health care system, telemedicine is a proven way to achieve this while enhancing quality and the patient experience. More than two dozen other states have seen the benefits of telemedicine and enacted legislation fostering its adoption and use. On behalf of the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals, I urge the Committee to approve HB267.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Erwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Erwin
Executive Director