



11 Beacon Street, Suite 710
Boston, MA 02108
Phone: 617-723-6100
Fax: 617-723-6111
www.cobth.org

July 18, 2017

Senator James B. Eldridge

Chair, Joint Committee on Financial Services
Massachusetts State House, Room 320

Representative Aaron Michlewitz

Chair, Joint Committee on Financial Services
Massachusetts State House, Room 254

Dear Senator Eldridge and Representative Michlewitz,

On behalf of the Conference of Boston teaching Hospitals (COBTH) and its thirteen member hospitals I would like to express our strong support for passage of ***HB578 and S549 - An Act Advancing and Expanding Access to Telemedicine Services***. COBTH is pleased to be part of the Massachusetts Telemedicine Coalition - a group of over 25 healthcare providers and organizations who have come together in support of this legislation

As you are aware, Massachusetts has enacted landmark legislation in the areas of healthcare access, quality and cost containment. To date, much of the cost-containment focus has been on how we pay for health care, but because healthcare delivery methods are rapidly changing, there is an opportunity for telemedicine — the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another through electronic communications - to play an important role in these reform. Other states which have enacted similar legislation report that telemedicine is capable of containing costs while enhancing both access to and quality of care. Telemedicine includes a 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 health information.

While Massachusetts has taken some steps to enable the practice of telemedicine, much more needs to be done. The majority of telemedicine programs in the Commonwealth are either grant funded trials or are limited provider network pilots. Patients who currently benefit from telemedicine have no guarantee of lasting services once the pilot programs conclude. To protect current telemedicine programs, and to expand access and services to other specialties, this legislation ensures parity in coverage for telemedicine services, thereby preventing discrimination in reimbursement solely because the service was provided via telemedicine. Across the country, the number of states enacting telemedicine “parity” laws such as HB578 and S549 has doubled in the past several years, and Massachusetts is now behind the 33 other states with similar legislation.

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

Additionally, these bills require the Board of Registration in Medicine to regulate and institute proxy credentialing for telemedicine services. This process will streamline credentialing for providers at each site where telemedicine is used, reducing the administrative burden in on-boarding a provider, which can often delay patient care

As we all look to ways to reduce costs, eliminate inefficiencies in our health care system, while enhancing quality and access, telemedicine is a proven way to achieve this while enhancing quality and the patient experience. Almost three 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 HB578 and S549. 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
Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals