Testimony in support of HB 5811, An Act Concerning the Provision of Telehealth Services, and HB 6951, An Act Concerning the Protection of Patients Receiving Telehealth Care or Services

Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Rep. Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee:

HB 5811 and HB 6951 are similar proposed bills which would require an in-person visit (and in the case of HB 6951, a physical examination) for the underlying medical condition for which a patient is seeking telehealth care or services. As a disability rights advocacy organization, Second Thoughts Connecticut supports the concept of these bills, which attempt to strike an appropriate balance between the promise of telehealth and the need to protect patients by requiring providers to have an in-person knowledge of a patient’s medical condition.

Our specific concern is that if assisted suicide (a/k/a “aid in dying” and similar euphemisms) were ever legalized in Connecticut—a prospect we vigorously oppose, and which this General Assembly has, thankfully, repeatedly rejected—it could open the door to telehealth suicides. As a result of doctor shopping, a provider who had no previous knowledge of a patient’s medical history could remotely prescribe via Skype a lethal dose of secobarbital or similar “aid in dying” drug or drug cocktail without ever examining the patient in person. If this seems a bit farfetched, there are bills currently being debated in New Mexico and Hawai’i which go far beyond the Oregon model and allow same-day assisted suicides with no second opinions, multiple requests, or reporting requirements, merely as part of a “standard of care.” The New Mexico legislation goes so far as to permit non-physicians to prescribe the lethal drugs: http://www.patientsrightsCouncil.org/site/new-mexico-end-of-life-options-act-hb-171-2017-analysis/ By requiring that the provision of telehealth include an in-person visit and examination, HB 5811 and HB 6951 would prohibit this most egregious abuse by making the initial in-person visit and examination part of the standard of care.

Telehealth offers much promise, particularly for disabled people who may have a more difficult time getting to and from a healthcare provider. Yet it is also important to ensure this careful balance between access to telehealth and protection of patients. We believe HB 5811 and HB 6951 strike this necessary balance.

Stephen Mendelsohn
171 Hartford Road, #19
New Britain, CT 06053-1532
smendelsohn5845@att.net