

## Serenity Wellness LLP

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To Whom it May Concern regarding **S.B. No. 1022 & HB 5596 An Act Concerning Telehealth,**

I own a private practice Serenity Wellness, where we treat over six hundred clients for medication management and/or psychotherapy. We accept Anthem BCBS, Aetna, Magellan, Meritain, Cigna, Optum/United/CTCare/HPHC, and Medicaid/Husky Health. I went into private practice to treat the LGBTQ community and more than 60% of our clients are LGBTQ, many are transgender or non-binary. The rest are adolescents, young adults, men and women of all walks of life between the ages of seven and seventy-two.

Many have underlying conditions that make them higher risk of dying from COVID should they contract it.

Telehealth has allowed our practice to continue its important work in treating patients with mental illness throughout the pandemic. Our clinicians have seen people at seven AM, on weekends, at 8:30 PM at night, we've held the pain of nurses, respiratory therapists, and physicians from their break rooms and from broom closets. We've seen new moms with newborns asleep on them, teenagers whispering in their rooms, and so many others over the past year only because we could see them through a screen.

We have been able to increase a part time APRN to full time in November 2020 and hire a full time therapist in January 2021. We are a business of only four employees but we added two full time jobs during a time when our economy was being devastated and only because we were able to see clients via telehealth.

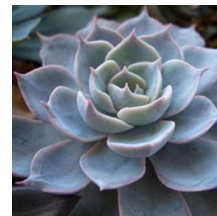
Anthem BCBS reimburses 63.33\$ for a 25 minute follow up. At baseline the 63.33 is already 50% of all the other commercial plans reimbursement rates (Cigna- 118\$, Aetna- \$115.96, Optum \$108.41 Medicaid- \$58.49). Their telehealth reimbursement is 49.00\$ flat rate regardless if it's 15 minutes or 30 minutes or an hour. If this bill is not passed 60% of our clients who have Anthem BCBS, many of whom are healthcare professionals, will not be able to utilize telehealth because Anthem's reimbursement is not sustainable for a small business.

We have been able to treat LGBTQ individuals living in rural and distant communities who prior to telehealth could not access a trans-competent healthcare provider. If telehealth parity and coverage is ended they will not have access to adequate healthcare.

Telehealth is not ideal for everyone. And we are excited to see patients in person again. But, we have been able to expand access to care for the LGBTQ community and healthcare workers who work off shifts and for parents who do not have childcare, and want to continue offering telehealth as an option for patients indefinitely.

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This bill is necessary for our small business to continue treating our clients. The mental health needs in Connecticut have not decreased in the last year. And March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 is not a magical date when mental health issues due to the pandemic disappear. People are suffering. We should be increasing and expanding access to care. Not decreasing it. If this is not passed Anthem BCBS will go back to not covering telehealth for many services and covering it an unsustainable reimbursement rate for small businesses. Please pass this bill for the mental health workers and consumers of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Meredith Bailey APRN