



CONNECTICUT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
PUBLIC HEALTH/INSURANCE COMMITTEES JOINT PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 15, 2021

Concerns regarding: HB 5596, AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH.
In support of: SB 1022, AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH.

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, Senator Hwang, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order that mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community.

The global pandemic has demonstrated the necessity of **telehealth** for maintaining access to health care. It is not clear to me that it is the Department of Public Health that should be conducting a study, as **HB 5596** proposes. Instead, it seems like it might make more sense for the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, the Insurance Department, or the Office of Health Strategies to be in charge of such a review.

Today marks the day that the required coverage of telehealth pursuant to Public Act 20-2, the law passed during last summer's special session. Many of us encouraged you to amend the bill last summer to make coverage of telehealth permanent. Instead, it remained time-limited, only through March 15, 2021.

Thankfully, the Governor has signed a new Executive Order (10C) extending the required coverage of telehealth through April 20, 2021.

Telehealth is not perfect, but it has resulted in many people having access to care when it was not safe for them to go to doctor's offices in person. Telehealth visits help to eliminate the problems caused by lack of transportation. We must ensure that telehealth is accessible to those with disabilities. We must also recognize that lack of access to technology means that telehealth is not the ideal solution for all patients.

Please make coverage of telehealth permanent. I encourage you to advance SB 1022 to the floor as expeditiously as possible, and e-certify it to the governor, so that a law mandating coverage of telehealth appointments is effective prior to the expiration of this latest Executive Order.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.