

**March 15, 2021**  
**Public Health and Insurance & Real Estate Committees**  
**H.B. 5596 An Act Concerning Telehealth and**  
**S.B. 1022 An Act Concerning Telehealth**

Good morning Senator Lesser, Senator Abrams, Representative Wood, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato, Representative Petit and members of the Insurance & Real Estate and Public Health Committees:

My name is Emily Morrison, I am a Putnam resident and the Director of Development at United Services, Inc. in Dayville.

United Services is the Local Mental Health Authority for 21 towns in Northeastern Connecticut. We are a nonprofit organization providing more than 30 programs to our community, including Outpatient Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment, Family Programs, and Crisis Services.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of H.B. 5596 and S.B. 1022**, Acts Concerning Telehealth. We support efforts in the legislature to codify the expansion of telehealth services that has occurred over the last year, ensuring that Connecticut:

1. **Continues to pay for telehealth at the same rate as in-person visits.**
2. **Allows telephonic/audio only sessions:** This is important to ensuring access to care for people, especially those who are low-income, who do not have access to technology needed for video conferencing.
3. **Allows the use of any HIPAA compliant platform**

When COVID-19 hit last March, we were ordered by our state funders to stop seeing people in person in most of our programs. United Services remained open and quickly deployed telehealth. This allowed us to safely connect with our patients and continue to provide the critical care they depend on from us.

Our offices have been providing in-person care since June 2020, but we also have continued to deliver services over telehealth. This has been especially helpful when a client has had to quarantine due to a COVID exposure or having COVID themselves. We have other clients who remain anxious about entering public spaces, such as our clinics. Telehealth allows them to stay engaged with treatment and continue to care for their mental health.

Per the committee's question during testimony, United Services telephone only services averaged 5-10 percent of our total services in the last 30 days. Telephone only services are sometimes delivered due to client issues with stable internet for video conferencing.

We are seeing huge increases in our programs. Some of our programs are operating at a more than 200 percent increase in services month to month over pre-COVID times. COVID has greatly impacted the

mental health of children, adults and families and telehealth helps us to stay connected to everyone in need of services.

We urge the Committees to pass robust telehealth legislation that guarantees all people in Connecticut will continue to have access to telehealth services using the device of their choosing, and that providers continue to be paid at the same rate as in-person services moving into the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.