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Written testimony in Public Health

March 15, 2021

On

SB NO. 1022: AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH

H.B. No. 5596 AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH.

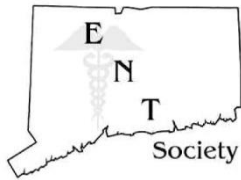
Senators Abrams, and Lesser, Representatives Steinberg and Wood, and distinguished members of the Public Health and Insurance and Real Estate Committees:

On behalf of the physicians and physicians-in-training of the Connecticut ENT Society, an organization representing over 90% of the otolaryngologists practicing in Connecticut, we thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony on **SB 1022 An Act Concerning Telehealth and on H.B. No. 5596 AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH.**

The Connecticut ENT Society strongly supports telehealth in the interest of our state's residents and healthcare providers. The importance of maintaining this mechanism of healthcare provider-patient interaction was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic which severely limited face-to-face contact. Telehealth was successful in promoting: 1) the provision of medical care for Connecticut residents who otherwise would not have had an avenue to address their health concerns, and 2) the opportunity for healthcare providers and entities to not only provide this essential care and treatment, but also to economically sustain their practices, which include small business organizations, with billable patient encounters

The COVID-19 pandemic proved that it is possible to utilize telehealth to advance the healthcare needs of our state's population. It provided essential access for patients who would otherwise would have been unable to secure the needed services, such as disabled, immunocompromised, or geriatric patients, to name just a few. Of course, telehealth does have limitations compared to face-to-face interactions, particularly with certain elements of the physical examination. Telehealth does, however, permit successful diagnosis and treatment of many conditions, as well as the screening and triage of more concerning conditions which may warrant immediate or urgent in-person care.

We support SB 1022 & 5596, but we do have a concern in the manner that SB 1022 defines a provider as being permitted to be located in any state or territory of the United States or the District of Columbia. This also applies to items J & K. It should be noted that while this open access policy can benefit Connecticut residents, it is vital to support our Connecticut healthcare providers who understand the local/state standards of care, and who are familiar with the available medical networks for prompt and optimal follow-up care. It is also important to consider the financial consequences for our Connecticut healthcare providers who should be



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prioritized over out-of-state providers. In addition Connecticut providers should have reciprocating telehealth access to patients in states or territories and District of Columbia, if our patients are allowed access to telehealth providers there. One other concern is that Connecticut currently prohibits non-licensed healthcare professionals from owning a medical practice. SB 1022 will permit a for-profit entity to employ licensed healthcare providers to provide telehealth services in a state which does not have a corporate medicine law. If not changed, such entities will undermine practice of medicine for the sake of profit through such practices as discounted compensation for out-of-state providers.

In conclusion, Connecticut ENT Society strongly supports Telehealth and appreciates the strong work in SB1022. Telehealth has proven to be a beneficial and important means to provide care for the citizens of Connecticut, and one which many patients view as a valuable and appreciated service. This was possible only because of the COVID-19 driven waiver of certain regulatory requirements, and we do hope that many of these relaxed regulations can be continued so that telehealth can remain a viable patient and provider option of care. We do, however, request the enactment of reciprocating agreements with out-of-state providers and restricting such agreements to states/territories which have corporate practice of medicine laws/doctrine consistent with Connecticut's doctrine to protect patients and support our Connecticut providers and their practices.

Respectfully,

Connecticut Ear, Nose and Throat Society

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