



Montgomery County Mental health Advisory Committee

Senate Bill 0278

March 22, 2021

Honorable Shane Pendergrass
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Pendergrass,

The Mental Health Advisory Committee of Montgomery County (MHAC), as mandated by the State of Maryland, is dedicated to monitoring the delivery of mental health services to county residents. The Committee also collaborates with community partners to advise and advocate for an effective comprehensive mental health system of care for all. Increasing access to mental health services through telehealth is one of our main priorities.

We are writing to express our support for **SB278 - State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – Maryland School-Based Health Center Standards - Telehealth**. This legislation is an emergency measure that eliminates an approval process that limits the ability of school-based health centers to provide telehealth services.

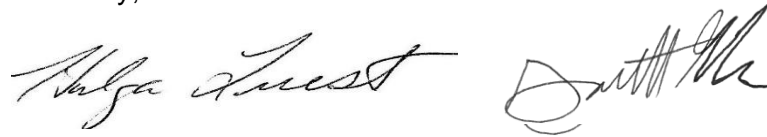
School-based health centers (SBHCs) serve as critical places within communities to provide health care, especially in underserved communities where access barriers prevent children and adolescents from using the health care system. SBHCs are linked to many health-related outcomes, including improved delivery of vaccinations and other preventive services, such as comprehensive health assessments, oral health, vision, substance use, nutrition, and other screening services; decreased asthma morbidity; increased use of contraceptives; increased access to and utilization of mental and behavioral health services; and decreased emergency department use and hospital admissions (JA Knopf, RK Finnie, Y Peng, et al.; Community Preventive Services Task Force. School-based health centers to advance health equity: a community guide systematic review. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2016; 51:114-126). Research evinces that students having access to care through telehealth at school had improved health and education outcomes. Using telehealth in SBHCs can improve health care access and equity for children and adolescents from low-income, underserved communities.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the telehealth flexibilities and waivers have played a critical role in increasing access to needed mental health and substance use disorder

services, while reducing providers' and the individual service recipients' risk and exposure to the coronavirus. Telehealth flexibilities have intrinsically become a part of the new normal and will be needed beyond the COVID-19 public health emergency. Telehealth has become an integral part of the Maryland's continuum of care and has helped to reduce or eliminate barriers to treatment. SBHCs need to be able to provide telehealth services to students as part of their regular service delivery model. Telehealth plays an important role in efforts to broaden the reach of health care to underserved school-aged populations.

We strongly support SB278.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Helga Luest' and the signature on the right is 'Garrett Mannchen'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helga Luest and Garrett Mannchen
Co-Chairs, Mental Health Advisory Committee

CC: Ways and Means Committee