

Chairman Priest and members of the committee, for the record I am Thelma McClosky Armstrong, Director of Telemedicine and Outreach at Billings Clinic and the Director of the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network. I am here today representing the 36 members of the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network and the Montana Telehealth Alliance. An alliance of telemedicine stakeholders from throughout the state that advocates for improved access, efficiencies, quality and cost effectiveness of health care through the use of telemedicine.

The Montana Telehealth Alliance and the members of the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network are extremely supportive of Senate Bill 270 to require insurance coverage for health care services provided via Telemedicine.

Today, licensed Montana physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and other health professionals provide clinical services over telemedicine to patients that would not otherwise have those services available in their community.

By providing care at the local level, patient burden of accessing care is reduced. In 2012, over 3000 patients received medical and mental health services through the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network. Those patients saved an estimated 1.9 million dollars in out of pocket expense. 96% of patients were retained in their local communities, improving access and supporting the local healthcare institution and the community at large. 94% of patients said they would have traveled for care if the service was not available through telemedicine.

Montana physician and provider shortages are well documented. Telemedicine facilitates the distribution of limited resources in a cost effective and efficient manner. Care can be delivered to patients without travel or inconvenience.

Telemedicine programs have been improving healthcare access to the citizens of Montana since 1993. Montana Telehealth Networks are recognized nationally for their innovation, quality and service they provide. Montana also has a reputation of being an early adopter of reasonable public policy. Montana was one of the first states in the country to adopt the State Board of Medical Examiners licensure legislation and Montana Medicaid identified the benefits of Telemedicine to their beneficiaries and began reimbursing for telemedicine in 1994. At the federal level Medicare developed reimbursement policy in 1997. And early on many private payers came to the table and developed favorable reimbursement policy. Over the past 12- 18 month we have experienced a change in the private market of denial for service. This is an alarming and concerning trend.

MTA believes that reimbursement parity for telemedicine is critical. That all insurance companies providing coverage in Montana should support the provision of care through Telemedicine. We are not asking for additional coverage but to allow telemedicine to be the delivery mechanism for an already covered service. We are asking for this committee support in moving this legislation forward.

On a personal note I have dedicated the last 20 years of my career ensuring that all citizens of Montana would have access to the healthcare they need no matter where they lived.... whether it was Ekalaka, Circle or Big Timber. I hope that I will not receive another call like the one I received right before Christmas from woman that was in tears...explaining to me that she just got notice from her insurance company that they would no longer cover the care that she had been receiving from her nephrologist for her kidney disease. She didn't know what she would do... she couldn't take time off from work to travel to Billings... The financial burden of travel would be overwhelming... The reason for the denial was they didn't cover telemedicine services. Not

that it wasn't medically necessary, not that it wouldn't be covered if she traveled to see the physician in person but the reason for denial was that it was provided through telemedicine.

Please support this legislation