



House Bill 166 – Proponent Testimony on Telemedicine
April 10, 2019

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member West and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, I thank you for the opportunity to provide supportive comments on a provision of House Bill 166.

My name is Dr. Brad Raetzke and I am the President of the American College of Emergency Physicians, Ohio Chapter (Ohio ACEP) and an emergency physician with Mid-Ohio Emergency Services, a group serving many emergency departments here in Central Ohio. On behalf of the nearly 1600 emergency medicine practitioners Ohio ACEP represents, I am here today to emphasize our support for the coverage of telemedicine services as provided for in House Bill 166.

As I am sure you are well aware, the emergency department is a fast-paced and complicated practice environment. Emergency physicians see and treat conditions that cross the entire spectrum of medicine. Mental illness is also something that is very prevalent in the emergency department. Many of our physician members don't get through a shift without seeing a patient experiencing a mental health or psychiatric episode.

When these psychiatric episodes occur, it is our duty to ensure that the patient has the appropriate and necessary access to crisis mental health services. However, those services can be difficult to obtain. There are not enough psychiatric practitioners or mental health treatment options to serve this population. This shortage is exacerbated during nontraditional work hours, i.e.: after 5pm and on the weekend.

As a result, many of our patients are "boarded" in the emergency department until we are able to connect them with appropriate care. Psychiatric boarding is a problem we hear about from our members on a regular basis. And it is not a problem with an easy solution. We see the telemedicine provision included in House Bill 166 as a valuable tool to address this problem. If we can provide psychiatric evaluations to patients who need them using telemedicine, and specialists can be reimbursed for those services, we would expect increased access to care for our patients in the emergency department. Ohio ACEP believes these benefits will be realized statewide, but in particular, in rural and underserved areas.

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As technology progresses, it is critical we take advantage of available tools to offer the best care to our patients. Many hospital emergency departments are incorporating telemedicine technologies into their systems. As explained in this testimony, this development could increase patient access to psychiatric evaluations, as well as be used for a variety of specialist consultations needed to give patients in the emergency department timely and comprehensive evaluations.

Thank you for your consideration of this perspective and I hope you will be able to support this important provision as a part of the budget.

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