

Chairman Brinkman, Ranking Member Boggs and members of the Ohio House Insurance Committee,

My name is Dr. Jim Broyles. I am a psychologist and the Director of Professional Affairs for the Ohio Psychological Association. My main duty is to provide support for our member psychologists on health insurance issues, as well as to advocate on their behalf with insurance companies who provide healthcare insurance in Ohio. As part of my responsibility, I help lead the Behavioral Health Provider Coalition for Insurance Advocacy. This is an Ohio based group comprised of behavioral health professional association leaders including social workers, counselors, psychiatrists, psychologist, drug and alcohol counselors, and advanced practice nurses. The primary purpose of the coalition is to advocate on providers' behalf for significant issues involving insurance companies and the delivery of adequate behavioral health services.

My goal today is to speak to you in support of HB 679. As you review the need for this bill, I ask you to consider the following important factors:

- During the current COVID-19 crisis, the ready availability of telebehavioral health services has been crucial for the wellbeing of Ohio citizens. This pandemic and its accompanying quarantine have created significant stress for a huge portion of our population. Teletherapy has become the only means of treatment for many impacted individuals. In addition, for Ohio citizens who require ongoing treatment for conditions existing before the crisis, telebehavioral health has become the only means which allow their treatment to continue.
- The only way most can access competent, affordable telebehavioral health services is if their current insurance plan offers coverage for it.
- Presently, most private insurance companies have been very responsive to the COVID-19 crisis. They have created emergency policies which make telebehavioral health services both available and readily accessible to most providers and their patients. However, telehealth services are *not* mandated by law for behavioral health services and providers, so the continued availability of these services exists at the discretion of the respective insurance companies. In other words, coverage for this type of service could be discontinued at any time.
- Many Ohio citizens currently receive healthcare insurance coverage through “self-funded” plans. These are plans which are funded, not by a private insurance company, but directly by the individual’s employer. Even though these plans cover a huge bulk of our Ohio population, they are not under the jurisdiction of the Ohio Department of Insurance. Many of these plans do not currently offer coverage for telebehavioral health services, and there is no current mandate for them to do so.

- Several features of HB 679 facilitate the accessibility of tele-behavioral health services for Ohio citizens, including restrictions on cost sharing as well as coverage for tallied minutes of service provided via email and telephone call.

Thank you for permitting me to testify on House Bill 679 and at this time I would happy to answer any questions.

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