

House Insurance Committee Testimony

House Bill 122

March 3, 2021

Chairman Brinkman, Vice Chair Lampton, Ranking Member Miranda, and members of the Committee. I am Chad Braun, Chief Medical Officer for Equitas Health, and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 122 to provide clear and consistent guidance to Ohio patients, providers, and payers who continue to rely on telehealth to reach patients where they are during this critical moment in time.

Equitas Health is a nonprofit, community-based health care organization that serves patients throughout Ohio with a diverse set of services, including primary and specialized medical care, pharmacy, behavioral health care, dental care, HIV/STI prevention, advocacy, and case management. We are a Community Health Center and the largest Ryan White Program provider in the state. We operate four health centers and pharmacies in Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati. Our mission is to be the gateway to good health for those at risk of or affected by HIV/AIDS, for the LGBTQ+ community, and for those seeking a welcoming health care home.

In 2019, our medical, pharmacy, and prevention teams considered what we could do to make PrEP—the medication that prevents HIV transmission—easier to maintain and even more accessible to all Ohioans. PrEP is a daily medication that is 99% effective at preventing HIV in patients with a negative HIV status and a vital resource in reducing the rate of transmission. Through our TelePrEP program, made possible by funding from the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), we were able to connect patients via phone or computer to a medical provider and clinical pharmacist to ensure access to this preventative medication and build the infrastructure to continue serving the community during their time of need.

Our ability to implement the TelePrEP program in early 2020 paved the way for the adjustments to our service model that COVID-19 demanded. Once the stay-at-home orders were issued in Ohio, in a matter of days, our medical providers and mental health counselors were conducting 90% of patient visits via telehealth. Due in part to the ability of our providers and other clinical staff to reach patients via phone and virtual visit, our patients were able to successfully navigate our new system and stay in care. We conducted over 7,600 remote medical and mental health counseling visits between March 15 to June 30, 2020 – and among these visits the attendance rates and satisfaction for our patients actually increased. This is a direct result of the flexibility and accessibility of telehealth services.

Telehealth continues to be a vital option for our patients across all service lines and all across the state of Ohio, and we believe it is here to stay. House Bill 122 is a necessary step in defining the scope of telehealth services in Ohio. By defining practitioners, services, and communication types, and by setting reimbursement standards, the proposed bill will help community health centers like Equitas Health plan for the future and continue to offer high quality care to Ohioans regardless of their location or ability to travel to one of our four medical centers. Additionally, HB 122 provides flexibility for providers to render services across state lines and provides further guidance for public health emergencies. As a provider located in the Walnut Hills neighborhood in Cincinnati, we know how important it is to be able to

maintain this flexibility when meeting the needs of a population that spans a large geographic region but may not be in the right zip code or the same state to receive the proper care.

HB 122 will set procedures to properly reimburse providers and ensure that patients who seek telehealth services will not see a change in their out-of-pocket costs – a necessary and important step in maintaining access to high quality *and* affordable care in the state of Ohio. While we continue to navigate the lasting impact of the pandemic and the economic uncertainty it has wrought on our communities, we must remain committed to protecting our consumer’s health and their financial resources.

In conclusion, I urge your support of HB 122 and ask that you consider the lasting and sustainable impact telehealth services have on behalf of our patients and clients at Equitas Health and all Ohioans. Thank you.

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