



**Proponent Testimony - House Bill 546
Health Committee
Ohio House of Representatives**

**Tia Buzzard, MHA
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Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the House Health Committee, my name is Tia Buzzard, and I am the Telehealth Program Manager at Akron Children's Hospital, as well as, a member of the Ohio Hospital Association's Telehealth Work Group. Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 546, which would require a health benefit plan to provide coverage for telehealth services on the same basis and to the same extent that the plan provides coverage for the provision of in-person health care services.

Akron Children's Hospital currently provides the following services via telemedicine: psychiatry, evaluations for child abuse, direction of critical care transports, palliative care, early intervention for children with autism, and intervention sessions for children with hearing loss. We also use this technology to enable parents with newborns in our neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) to connect to the provider team in order to participate in family centered rounds while the mother is still at the birth hospital and unable to attend rounds in person. In addition to these active programs, Akron Children's Hospital is also developing telemedicine services for dermatology, maternal fetal medicine, common minor medical complaints, and expansion of behavioral health services.

Telemedicine services should be covered to the same extent as in-person services as proposed in HB 546. Such parity will not increase covered services, but will recognize telemedicine as an effective way of delivering services already covered by payers. Over thirty-one states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws mandating private payer coverage of services provided via telemedicine.

Passage of HB 546 will allow health care providers, through investment in telemedicine services and technologies, to reduce disparities in access to care; empower consumer choice of how and where to receive care; extend provider availability; and, in many cases, improve quality of care. Telemedicine can also reduce costs to the healthcare system and economy overall by minimizing transportation needs for consumers and providers, increasing access to care in cost-effective settings (e.g., reducing utilization of emergency departments and inpatient units), and by decreasing time away from work and school.

As the Ohio General Assembly considers health care reform, in the interest of improving quality, increasing access and reducing costs, telemedicine holds incredible promise. The immediate promise of telemedicine is arguably greatest for those Ohioans living in rural areas facing existing shortages of healthcare services close to home. Telemedicine will continue to evolve as patients, providers and payers adjust care delivery to the new technology, however innovation and progress will falter if telemedicine is not a recognized and covered service. Akron Children's believes strongly in the promise of telemedicine and encourages the members of the House health Committee to support the health care innovation by supporting passage of House Bill 546.