

Good morning. My name is Myles Stickle and I am the Director of Behavioral Health Services at Equitas Health. I want to thank Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and the members of the House Health Committee for the opportunity to share Equitas Health's support for House Bill 546.

Equitas Health is a nonprofit, community-based health care organization serving more than 67,000 individuals across Ohio through a diverse set of services, including primary and specialized medical care, behavioral health, dental care, HIV/STI prevention, advocacy, and case management. We are a Federally Qualified Health Center, and also operate pharmacies in Columbus and Dayton. 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.

Equitas Health supports House Bill 546 for two simple reasons: it will allow more Ohioans to get needed services and it recognizes that advances in technology and medicine make care delivery through telemedicine safe and effective.

There is no doubt that provider shortages exist in many parts of Ohio, and this bill will help alleviate the strain placed on existing providers. Additionally, according to the American Telemedicine Association ("ATA"), studies consistently show that quality of health care services delivered via telemedicine is as good as traditional in-person services, if not better. The ATA has, in fact, produced a series of standards, guidelines, and best practices for health care providers to ensure they are delivering telemedicine services appropriately.

House Bill 546 makes important strides toward ensuring that telemedicine services provided by certain types of health care professionals – including physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice nurses – are covered by commercial insurance companies. The bill does not include in its list of health care professionals non-physician, non-PA, and non-NP behavioral health professionals. So while this bill *would* allow coverage for behavioral health services provided by psychiatrists, psychiatric PAs, and psychiatric NPs, it would *not* allow for coverage of behavioral health services provided by social workers or other licensed behavioral health professionals, to name a few.

Equitas Health does employ two psychiatric NPs. We do not employ psychiatrists or psychiatric PAs. The shortage of psychiatric providers in Ohio is staggering. So this bill will certainly help us stretch psychiatric services into parts of Ohio that absolutely need it. We encourage you to consider adding behavioral health professionals to the list of health care professionals included in this bill so that we can also provide other needed behavioral health services, such as counseling, to our patients throughout Ohio.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you Equitas Health's support for House Bill 546, which will improve access to needed services for Ohioans. Thank you.

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