



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

Ohio General Assembly – Senate Health Committee

Written Testimony of Holly Pendell,
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Testimony on HB 122

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 122, in regards to provisions in telehealth services.

MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms vary from person to person and range from numbness and tingling to walking difficulties, fatigue, dizziness, pain, depression, blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment are leading to better understanding and moving us closer to a world free of MS. Nearly 1 million people in the United States and 2.3 million worldwide are currently living with MS.

The Society offers our strong support of House Bill 122 and commends the bill's sponsors. Telehealth and telemedicine services help provide access to medically necessary care for individuals that may have limited mobility or live in an area where there is a shortage of primary or specialty health care providers. These services allow patients to access healthcare through various platforms including telephone, digital communications, and video chats with their health care providers.

Telemedicine and telehealth services are instrumental in ensuring that people with MS get the care they need, as it broadens the number of providers that people living with MS have access to while making it easier and less costly to reach those providers for routine consultations. The Society believes that expanded use of these services allows states to implement innovative health policy reforms that improve health care access and achieve significant cost savings and improve health outcomes for people living with multiple sclerosis, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

For people living with MS, HB 122's provisions to expand telehealth services to the practices of psychologists; audiologists and speech-language pathologists; occupational therapists and physical therapists; professional

clinical counselors, independent social workers, and pharmacists are all critical to their ongoing maintenance of health. The provisions that require a long-term care facility to provide video-conferencing visitation options in the situation of a declared disaster will bring peace of mind to many people living with MS and their families, as well as contribute to mental health wellbeing. Additionally, the inclusion of telehealth services for Medicaid beneficiaries is positive step in meeting the needs of all Ohioans, specifically those most challenged by the economic hardships of the COVID pandemic.

Telehealth fulfills a great need for Ohioans, especially those living with significant disabilities. The National MS Society urges this committee – and the larger legislative body – to continue to improve telehealth in Ohio by passing HB 122 in a timely manner. Allowing individuals, especially those with chronic diseases such as MS, to use telehealth to conveniently access a wide range of providers, will improve the lives and health of many. We look forward to working with your committee and the legislature on this issue.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance: holly.pendell@nmss.org or 614.395.5290.

