

Public Testimony
July 21, 2020
Submitted by Julia Winer, Parent, West Hartford, CT

SUPPORT: LCO No. 3614, An Act Concerning Telehealth

Dear members of the Connecticut General Assembly,

I strongly urge you to support extended insurance coverage for speech services provided virtually via telehealth.

My son has a motor speech delay that significantly impacts his ability to produce sounds. After being evaluated by multiple entities, including CT's Birth to Three system and identified by each as having a statistically significant language delay that required immediate services, he started speech therapy with Jen Lano at Speakology in January of 2019.

Since then, he has attended therapy two or three times a week with Speakology. He took a short break in February 2020, when he was admitted to the Early Learning Center at Whiting Lane following an evaluation by the West Hartford Public Schools that determined my son needed to attend the program half-days and receive regular therapy sessions individually and with peers in order to continue his progress. When West Hartford Public Schools abruptly closed due to COVID-19, all therapy services required by his Individualized Education Program (IEP) and provided by the district *ceased entirely*. He went from three speech sessions per week to zero. For a child that is already behind and struggling to keep up with peers, this was terrifying for our family.

We were very lucky to be able to quickly reconnect with Speakology, and my son resumed virtual speech therapy with Jen the exact SAME DAY that it was approved for coverage by our insurance company. For children that need therapy, virtual therapy during this time isn't a nice to have, it is an emergency, and we need to treat it as such. I cannot imagine how my son would be doing today if it weren't for the telehealth services that we have received from Speakology over the past five months. West Hartford Public Schools did not begin offering virtual services to my son until THREE months after school closed and only because my partner and I were persistent that they meet the requirements of his IEP.

The quality of the virtual therapy, and the results for my son, are equal to the extremely high-quality, in-person services that we received from Speakology. The therapist has done everything possible to make these sessions meaningful, engaging, effective, and fun for my son. Like all medical services, each patient will have different needs and preferences. Perhaps for some, virtual services are not the preferred method. However, **I can tell you without hesitation, that virtual services work for my child, and at this point in time, we strongly prefer to continue with virtual services rather than return to in-person services.**

Let me tell you a little bit about our family life as a result of COVID. We are lucky. My partner and I have two good jobs for which we are required to work 40+ hours per week from home. We have two toddlers, a three-year old and a two-year old who have been home with us full time since mid-March. In order to meet our work obligations, we alternate – one of us cares for our children while the other one works – throughout the day. One of us starts work at 6 am and one of us ends work at 10 pm. It is an absolute slog to manage, and it requires constant communication and coordination.

In addition to the completely unnecessary health risks, which are immense and obvious, it would be burdensome on our family and disruptive to our already precarious schedule to have to travel to speech therapy sessions when we can receive the same quality services without having to leave our home.

I welcome any member of the Connecticut General Assembly to join me and my son during a virtual speech session with Jen Lano to observe for yourself the quality of this instruction format. Please contact me at juliamwiner@gmail.com to arrange for such an observation.

Please do what is right for children and families and extend coverage for telehealth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.