



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Insurance and Real Estate Committee
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LCO 3614 An Act Concerning Telehealth

Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

My name is Liz Gustafson and I am the State Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut. I am testifying in support of increasing access to telehealth services (Draft LCO 3614 AAC Telehealth), as it is imperative to ensuring everyone can receive quality and affordable health care, and ensure providers are equipped to meet their patients' needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the social and economic realities of Connecticut residents, and has exacerbated inequities of access, coverage, and overall health. Decisions about sexual and reproductive health care are fundamental and personal, and any delay in receiving that care can have serious consequences for many people. Although our state has taken steps to make telehealth more accessible during the initial phases of the current public health crisis, it is clear that we must expand access by implementing measures included in this legislation.

Access to telehealth options allows people to receive many sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and interact with providers- all while practicing social distancing and reducing exposure to coronavirus. For example, a recent study found 24% of women utilizing the birth control pill as a form of contraception have switched to a telemedicine appointment with their provider to refill their prescription (Guttmacher Institute, 2020¹). Telehealth also provides a way we can address concerning maternal health outcomes and correlated health inequities. As we continue to address a maternal mortality crisis with stark racial disparities in our country, it is crucial we find ways to implement sustainable and transformative change so pregnant people can access virtual visits with their providers.

While increasing access to telehealth will not (and should not) completely replace in-person for specific preventative SRH services, minimizing public health risks and adapting telehealth capacity is

¹ <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/early-impacts-covid-19-pandemic-findings-2020-guttmacher-survey-reproductive-health>

imperative as we navigate this unprecedented time.

As Connecticut continues to implement efforts to improve access to quality and affordable health care via telehealth and flatten the COVID-19 curve, it would be negligent to not also address the following;

- Gaps in internet accessibility for various regions and communities in the state, particularly people of color, low-income people, rural communities, and young people. Investing in telehealth infrastructure (such as the Federal CARES Act), which includes not only expanding broadband/wireless access but also providing financial assistance to acquire the necessary equipment for providers and patients.
- Safeguarding and strengthening privacy protections of sensitive health information.

Expanding telehealth capacity and accessibility is a necessary step to ensure access to essential comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care services. Everyone deserves access to the health care that is best for them, their families, and their futures. I urge lawmakers to leverage increased attention and support of the expansion of telehealth infrastructure, which will aid in facilitating a more equitable health care system.