

**Testimony on behalf of the Amplify  
Before the Judiciary Committee  
In support of Bill LCO 3614 An Act Concerning Telehealth  
July 21, 2020  
Marcia DuFore, Suffield CT**

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

My name is Marcia DuFore. I am writing as Executive Director of Amplify and as an active member NAMI, the CT Prevention Network and the Keep the Promise Coalition.

I am testifying in support of Bill LCO 3614 An Act Concerning Telehealth.

Our Board's responsibility is to study the behavioral health needs of people in our region and assist the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to set priorities for improved or expanded services to meet those needs. In order to carry out that responsibility, we do a lot of listening. We hear and hope to give voice to the stories of people in our region. This is one of our most important responsibilities - to ensure that the voice of people most impacted by the system of care have a strong voice in guiding and monitoring that system.

A large percentage of our members are people in recovery from mental health or addiction disorders. Many experienced an initial disruption in treatment services and supports due to closures imposed by the CoVID-19 pandemic - this during a time when people were experiencing an increased mental health and addiction concerns as a direct result of the pandemic. We applaud the responsiveness of state and federal leaders to offer expanded resources and exceptions to rules that would have cut off access to needed services. We also applaud the flexibility, adaptability, and commitment by behavioral health providers to establish telehealth services and supports as quickly as possible during such a challenging time.

And so, in spite of the social isolation and trauma imposed by CoVid19, the relaxation of rules to allow for outpatient services via telehealth was a surprisingly positive outcome that both those seeking help for behavioral health challenges and their providers appreciated immensely. Providers reported a decrease in no-show appointments and a new ability to converse with and observe their clientele in the comfort of their home environments. Individuals in recovery reported less frustration over transportation barriers along with easier and safe access to services. Individuals seeking Methadone treatment appreciated not having to stand in line daily at a facility to receive medication. Both individuals and providers alike indicate they hope some of the positive experiences forced by a reliance on telehealth are not sacrificed if and when things return to "normal." We anticipate return to "normal" is a long way off. This positive outcome must be sustained if we are to maintain the health and safety of our residents.

Most of our members relied on audio-only telephone access for telehealth services. Many are covered by Medicaid and qualify for free phones through the Lifeline Assistance program. Most do not have computers or access to WIFI in their homes. They tend to rely on Recovery Clubhouses managed by their behavioral health providers or local libraries to access WIFI. Both of these options were closed and cut off to them. Throughout April through June, people using Lifeline Assistance program phones also had unlimited data and minutes, so they readily used their phones for telehealth and did not have to worry about running out of minutes during their therapy session. As of June 30, 2020, those unlimited data and minute features ended. As important as it is to ensure providers' costs are covered for providing needed services via telehealth, it is equally important to ensure that the cost of participation in treatment services does not create new access barriers for people who need them.

Our ask it that you find a way to maintain telehealth services for both video and audio-only access. Our additional ask is that you carefully consider all the costs of participation in treatment services and ensure that Connecticut does not create new access barriers and new health inequity concerns for some of our most vulnerable residents.

Thank you for all you do and for your time and attention to these important matters before you.