

Testimony on behalf of Amplify, Inc.
Before the Judiciary Committee
In support of Bill LCO 3614 An Act Concerning Telehealth
July 21, 2020
Quyen Truong, Hartford CT

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

My name is Quyen Truong. I am writing as Special Projects Manager of Amplify and as an active member of the Ministerial Health Fellowship, the CT Prevention Network, and Keep the Promise Coalition. I am testifying in support of Bill LCO 3614: An Act Concerning Telehealth.

Please find a way to maintain telehealth services for both video and audio-only access, and offer corresponding supports so that individuals can access telehealth services via free phone minutes and data plans. Currently, telehealth proposals primarily focus on ensuring that providers get reimbursement for telehealth services without consideration for how individuals can access those services.

In March, due to the pandemic, our community members on Medicaid got a Lifeline Assistance phone plan that gave them unlimited minutes, 5GB of data, and unlimited texts. In spite of the social isolation and stress imposed by Covid-19, the relaxation of rules to allow for outpatient services via telehealth helped improve compliance and recovery for people struggling with behavioral health. Providers reported a big decrease in no-show appointments and a new ability to connect with clients in the comfort of their homes. Individuals in recovery reported less frustration over transportation barriers along with easier and safer 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 indicated they hope telehealth will continue if and when everything returns to “normal.” We anticipate a return to “normal” is a long way off. Telehealth’s positive outcomes must be sustained if we are to maintain the health and safety of our residents.

Please maintain telehealth service for both video and audio-only access. Most of our members rely on audio-only telephone access for telehealth services. They 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, leaving many of our members struggling to figure out whether to pay for their medication, food, rent, or for additional minutes for therapy and psychiatry appointments.

We understand that continuing the phone plans for people on HUSKY can cost millions of dollars, but during the pandemic, perhaps funds that were used for transportation can be diverted to offering people access to more minutes or data on their cell phone plans. 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.

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