



July 21, 2020

Joint Committee on Insurance and Real Estate
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2800
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony Regarding LCO3614: Increasing Access to Telehealth Services

Dear Co-Chairs Lesser and Scanlon and Members of the Joint Committee on Insurance and Real Estate:

My name is Ruth Canovi and I am the American Lung Association's Director of Advocacy in Connecticut. The Lung Association appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on Increasing Access to Telehealth Services.

The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary public health association in the United States, currently representing the 37 million Americans living with lung diseases including asthma, lung cancer and COPD, including over 432,000 Connecticut residents. The Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through research, education and advocacy.

In March 2017, the Lung Association committed to a set of healthcare principles¹. The principles state that any changes to the healthcare system must achieve healthcare that is affordable, accessible and adequate for patients. These same principles must apply to healthcare accessed via telehealth. The Lung Association encourages the Committee to keep patients at the center of any legislative changes to telehealth and to thoroughly review all the emergency regulations through the patient lens.

Telehealth has emerged as a lifeline for many patients during the COVID-19 public health pandemic. Recognizing the need for patients, including those with lung disease, to continue to see their provider without exposing themselves or their families to COVID-19. Governor Lamont's March 10 Executive Order expanding Medicaid flexibilities for providers to perform telehealth through audio-only is one emergency regulation to allow for easier utilization of telehealth.

As the committee considers LCO No. 3614, "An Act Concerning Telehealth," it is paramount that patients are at the center of any changes, even temporary changes. This bill would help all patients, including those with lung disease, access healthcare through next year by expanding telehealth services for both Medicaid and private insurance.

The American Lung Association in Connecticut appreciates the flexibilities for provider and patients to access needed healthcare via telehealth for the next year. The flexibilities outlined in this legislation will allow patients to continue to see their providers and access healthcare without exposing themselves or family members to COVID-19.

¹ Consensus Healthcare Reform Principles – Available at: <https://www.lung.org/getmedia/9c98530e-a5d3-4257-ba88-0aa3e0878ef5/052820-healthcare-principles42logos.pdf>

As the Committee continues to work to expand telehealth in Connecticut, the Lung Association asks the Committee to view these changes from a patient perspective, with special consideration given to patients who are unable to utilize telehealth. Telehealth has great opportunity to expand access to healthcare, but when rushing to improve access telehealth, policymakers cannot inadvertently reduce access for some of the most vulnerable patients in our country. The Lung Association believes any changes to the telehealth regulations must center around patient access, affordability and adequacy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Ruth Canovi
Advocacy Director, Connecticut

