



**Written Testimony of Thomas Burr
Insurance and Real Estate Committee
July 21, 2020**

Re: LCO No. 3614, AN ACT CONCERNING TELEHEALTH

Good afternoon Senator Lessor, Representative Scanlon, and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. My name is Thomas Burr, and I am the Community and Affiliate Relations Manager at the Connecticut State Office of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut). NAMI is the nation's largest mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut has been providing support groups, education programs, and advocacy for people, including children, affected by mental illness for 35 years.

NAMI Connecticut (NAMI CT) envisions a world where all people affected in any way by mental health conditions experience the best possible quality of life and where mental health is accepted as an integral part of overall wellbeing. Our mission is to provide support, education, and advocacy for people in Connecticut who are affected by mental illness.

I am here today in support of LCO No. 3614, An Act Concerning Telehealth. Increased use of telehealth has helped many people, including those with mental health conditions, receive needed services during this pandemic. Also, some providers have seen their appointment cancellation and no-show rates have dropped significantly with telehealth. In other words, more people are receiving the care that they need. Certainly, people in Connecticut that do not have easy access to transportation, or childcare, find telehealth a godsend. Whether you ask providers, or the people they serve, both are experiencing benefits of telehealth. And of course, telehealth should be covered at parity with in-person services (when care can be appropriately delivered via telehealth).

NOTE: My own personal experience with my son and his path to recovery from Bipolar Disorder is that I wish we had this option back when he was ill. Getting John to an appointment was often a monumental task, whereas if we could have used a telehealth solution like Zoom or Skype, we may have had a much easier time getting him the treatment he so desperately needed back then.



You may also be aware that just last week, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai called on Congress to permanently expand the flexibilities for telehealth granted during the public health emergency, noting that the FCC has distributed CARES Act funding for telehealth to 539 applicants in 47 states, D.C., and Guam. Additionally, Chairman Pai clarified that state governments should relax licensing requirements to allow for telehealth to be provided across state lines.

On a related note, on June 9th, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma also called for a permanent expansion of telehealth access after COVID-19.

Please note, however, that we are opposed to the bill sunseting on June 30, 2021 and would prefer that it continue indefinitely. As I understand it, the State of Colorado has already passed a bill that codifies telehealth in perpetuity.

In summary, we urge you to vote yes on this important and helpful legislation.
Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Thomas Burr
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