



**Testimony of Trisha A. Farmer, MSN, RN, CPHRM
Vice President of Regional Partnerships & Operations
at Connecticut Children's Medical Center
to the Insurance & Real Estate Committee regarding
Increasing Access to Telehealth Services
July 21, 2020**

Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon, and other esteemed members of the Insurance & Real Estate Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts regarding increasing access to telehealth services.

My name is Trisha Farmer and I am the Vice President of Regional Partnerships and Operations at Connecticut Children's and I oversee telemedicine efforts throughout our pediatric health system.

Before commenting on the bill, I want to provide some background about Connecticut Children's, a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 2,900 employees and 1,190 on our medical staff, we are the only hospital in the State dedicated exclusively to the care of children.

Since mid-March, Connecticut Children's has performed more than 25,000 virtual visits and we are averaging 600 virtual visits per day. We have implemented virtual health capabilities across our health system for children needing primary care, specialty care and hospital services.

Telehealth helps bring the unique expertise of Connecticut Children's specialty physicians to kids in every corner of the state, kids in urban and rural settings, and kids without access to reliable transportation. During the pandemic and into the future, the use of telehealth services will help improve children's access to the high-quality health care provided by Connecticut Children's, no matter their zip code or household income level.

Through virtual conversations, our doctors can also share best practices, care protocols and guidance with community pediatricians as well as community hospital providers. Not only does this help reduce hospital visits, it allows children to receive care in a more familiar location and without having to find transportation, have parents take as much time off of work, and travel a great distance to one of our physical locations. Improving the state's use of telemedicine would allow more children to receive specialized care in the comfortable and familiar setting of their home or their close-to-home pediatrician's office or community hospital.

At Connecticut Children's, we treat many kids with complex medical conditions and immunodeficiencies. For many patients, traveling outside of the home for medical appointments is an immense physical and oftentimes emotional challenge any time of year, not just during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Allowing more visits to be conducted virtually is significantly easier and safer for many patients and can also be more effective for treating children with behavioral challenges who may be unhappy or uncomfortable in a medical setting.

Additionally, we know that a child's health is determined by a myriad of factors, most of which occur outside of the traditional healthcare setting. It can be challenging for pediatricians to address these social determinants of health factors via a few short visits in an exam room. Telemedicine has the ability to give pediatricians a "glimpse" into the home environments of their patients and provide a better understanding of the various familial, environmental, and nutritional challenges a child may be facing. We are confident that witnessing and helping to address some of the external challenges in a child's home life will lead to better health outcomes for our Connecticut's kids.

Connecticut Children's urges the State of Connecticut to make permanent the telemedicine policy changes enacted in response to the public health emergency due to the significant benefits they provide to our patient families. We also appreciate that the legislature is considering an extension of these changes until June 30, 2021. The utility of telehealth as a tool for providers and patients is obvious during the pandemic and we expect it to be a key part of our delivery system going forward. This proposed timeline helps provide certainty that telehealth can continue to improve access during the coming months as legislators consider more permanent changes to relevant statutes in the 2021 session.

Thank you for your consideration of this position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Jane Baird, Connecticut Children's Senior Director of External Relations, at 860-837-5557.