



Rhode Island Society of Addiction Medicine

A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

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June 9, 2020

The Honorable Joshua Miller
Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
82 Smith Street
State House, Room 212
Providence, RI 02903-1105

Re: Support for SB2525A

Dear Chairman Miller and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Society of Addiction Medicine (RISAM) the medical specialty society representing physicians and other clinicians in Rhode Island who specialize in the prevention and treatment of addiction, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for recommending passage of SB2525A, which would significantly improve insurance coverage of health care services delivered through telemedicine in the state.

We applaud the steps this bill would take to ensure that health insurers adequately cover and reimburse telemedicine services. Across the country, several states, counties and localities are reporting increases in opioid overdoses and deaths, likely due to COVID-19.ⁱ Historically, after traumatic national events such as 9/11 or hurricane Katrina, there is an uptick in those suffering from substance use disorder (SUD) and other mental health issues.ⁱⁱ Therefore, it is vitally important that the state of Rhode Island take action to improve access to SUD and mental health services so that all those seeking treatment can access it. Furthermore, the potential benefits of expanding telehealth are not limited exclusively to access. A treatment model that incorporates telehealth can allow for more frequent communication with a patient's care team, provide additional privacy, address the stigma of receiving treatment, give clinicians insight into patients' personal lives, and possibly improve the therapeutic alliance.ⁱⁱⁱ

This bill contains specific provisions that would empower clinicians to deliver more care through telehealth. By changing the definition of "originating site" to allow for patients to receive telehealth services in any location, the bill would improve patient access, including in rural and underserved areas. Furthermore, by changing the definition of "telehealth" to include audio-only telephone conversations, and by prohibiting the usage of various cost-sharing measures by insurers, the bill would benefit economically disadvantaged individuals, and those who may not own a two-way audio-visual capable communication device. Additionally, by prohibiting prior authorization for health care services offered through telemedicine, this bill would allow patients to receive treatment when they need it, without patients and clinicians having to navigate potentially burdensome bureaucratic processes. Finally, the bill would also take the important step of ensuring that providing telehealth services remains financially viable for clinicians by

requiring that health insurers reimburse telemedicine services delivered by in-network providers at least at the same level as if the services were provided in-person.

RISAM shares the state of Rhode Island's goal of expanding access to high-quality, evidence-based, and comprehensive addiction treatment services. We thank you for recommending the bill for passage, and strongly recommend that the Senate pass it. Please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Andrew Stone at acstonemd@gmail.com if RISAM and can be of any service to you. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Stone', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Stone, MD, MPH
President, the Rhode Island Society of Addiction Medicine

CC:

The Honorable Gayle Goldin
The Honorable Betty Crowley
The Honorable Val Lawson
The Honorable Donna Nesselbus
The Honorable Adam Satchell
The Honorable Jim Sheehan
The Honorable Bridget Valverde
The Honorable Thomas Paolino

ⁱ The American Medical Association. (2020). Issue brief: Reports of increases in opioid-related overdose and other concerns during COVID pandemic. Chicago, Illinois: AMA. Available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-05/issue-brief-increases-in-opioid-related-overdose.pdf>

ⁱⁱ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2001). Stress and Substance Abuse: A Special Report After the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks. Rockville, Maryland: NIDA. Available at <https://archives.drugabuse.gov/publications/stress-substance-abuse-special-report-after-911-terrorist-attacks>

ⁱⁱⁱ Uscher-Pines, L., Huskamp, A., Mehrotra, A. (2020). Treating Patients With Opioid Use Disorder in Their Homes. Chicago, Illinois: The American Medical Association. Available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2766674>