



Essentia Health

House Commerce and Finance Committee

HF 1412

February 26, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Stephenson and committee members for this opportunity to weigh in on this important issue to health care in Minnesota. My name is Dr. Sarah Manney, and I serve as Essentia Health's Chief Medical Information Officer and maintain a pediatric practice in Duluth. On behalf of the Minnesota Hospital Association and Essentia Health, I respectfully request your support of House File 1412.

While the pandemic has forced health care providers to navigate numerous challenges, it has also presented ample opportunities to find new, innovative ways to ensure timely access to high quality, comprehensive health care services. With many patients understandably fearful of COVID-19 and hesitant to come into primary care clinics and hospitals, we have learned that they want to access telehealth services directly from a residential setting. Allowing a home setting to serve as an originating site has become a crucial option for patients to receive high quality services that prevent the worsening of chronic health issues and reduce potentially avoidable ER visits – all without risking infection or utilizing bed capacity and other medical resources.

We've also learned that another important tool to ensuring timely access to health care services has been the ability for our providers to utilize audio-only telephone communications to serve patients who only have landline phones or do not have access to broadband internet. This is especially true for our elderly, low-income, and underserved patients, who often lack the technology and resources needed to access virtual visits.

Along with the Minnesota Hospital Association and the other providers and stakeholders you will hear from today, Essentia Health urges this body to continue to allow providers to deliver services directly to a patient's residence – whether these services are provided over a telephone, tablet, laptop, or personal computer.

Essentia Health is an integrated health system serving patients in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota. Headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota, we have 13,300 employees who serve patients and communities through our 13 hospitals, 69 clinics, and 6 long term care facilities. Since March 2020, Essentia Health has conducted approximately 389,000 virtual visits directly to patients, with almost 40% of these visits being offered over the telephone. During this time, these virtual visits have allowed Essentia Health to conduct over 80% of its mental health encounters, avoid countless ER visits, and save patients' lives.

While the number of virtual visits leveled off since the early months of the pandemic, virtual visits still account for roughly 20% of Essentia's encounters and will remain an important tool to ensuring access to care throughout the rural and underserved communities we are privileged to serve.

As a pediatrician, I have experienced the overwhelming benefits of virtual visits firsthand. For instance, my first virtual visit was with a young child who was very ill and quickly deteriorating. By being able to treat this patient directly in the home, I was able to transfer the patient to a higher level of care, saving the transportation time that could have affected her outcome. I have also been able to provide mental health services to a teenager in rural Minnesota who attended the visit with both her parents from her home church that provided the broadband internet necessary for our visit. These, of course, are only a few examples of how I can leverage the benefits of virtual visits for my patients.

For these reasons, we ask this Committee to support House File 1412. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dr. Sarah Manney
Chief Medical Information Officer
Essentia Health