



March 13, 2017

The Honorable Matt Dean
Chairman, House Health and Human Services Finance Committee
401 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Re: Vote YES on HF 1561: Expanding the cap on telemedicine visits

Dear Chairman Dean and Committee Members,

I am writing you with the Minnesota Rural Health Association's (MRHA's) strong support of House File 1561. MRHA is a statewide, non-profit membership association missioned to strengthen the health, health care and well-being of rural Minnesotans through leadership, education, advocacy and collaboration. In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature wisely enacted the Minnesota Telemedicine Act, providing equity in reimbursement for health care visits provided via telemedicine. MRHA has long supported expansion of telemedicine as part of the solution for providing needed care to underserved rural residents, particularly in the area of mental health.

Telemedicine is a viable, cost-effective approach to delivering a range of mental health services in the community, increasing access across Minnesota. Recent legislative testimony on school-based mental health grants for programs in Carlton County and Fon Du Lac underscored the benefits of using telemedicine as opposed to having providers on the road. Telemedicine is a vital strategy for extending limited expert resources to help people who would otherwise not have access to the care they need when they need it. State policy and investments need to keep pace and support the expansion and accessibility of telemedicine.

We urge you to increase the current cap on billable telemedicine encounters under Medical Assistance because it is critical to increasing access to needed health care services. The alternative is to spend more money and time transporting health care providers and/or patients across great distances when time is critical. While face-to-face encounters are important, telemedicine can help bridge time and distances, delivering necessary, stabilizing care when every second counts.

These are the reasons MRHA supports HF1561, providing more telemedicine visits to meet care needs across Minnesota. Thank you for your service to the people of Minnesota and for your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Gottwalt", is written over a faint, light blue circular watermark or background.

Steve Gottwalt
Executive Director
steve@mnruralhealth.org