



Monday, March 8, 2021

Dear Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity activists across Minnesota, I am writing today to support the important reforms in HF1412, the Minnesota Telehealth Act, and urge you to support the bill.

COVID-19 exposed a tragic reality: Our health care system is undermined by too much bureaucracy and red tape that prevents doctors, nurses, and medical researchers from helping people. Even as access to quality health care has become more important than ever, many Americans have been limited in their ability to get the care they need and have been understandably hesitant to visit providers in person because of the risk of contracting the coronavirus.

In April of last year, we commended actions at both the federal and state levels that removed many of the bureaucratic barriers that stood in the way of our most vulnerable citizens getting the care they need. Across the nation, telemedicine restrictions were waived to allow safer doctor visits from home, licensing laws were suspended, giving medical professionals the ability to work where they were needed most, and restrictions on hospital beds and equipment were lifted.

The result can't be understated - lives were saved as a result of these important reforms.

Specific to this bill, telemedicine has allowed providers to diagnose and prescribe treatment to more patients with COVID-19, helping them recover at home and avoiding unnecessary exposure. It has allowed Minnesotans to continue to see their doctor, even as they kept themselves and their families safe at home. It has ensured that health care providers maintain a greater capacity to treat critically ill patients in person, with a reduced risk of overwhelming delivery systems.

At the same time, telemedicine has reduced costs for both patients and providers. An Anthem HealthCore study of claims for acute, non-urgent care found that telemedicine saved 6 percent in care costs by providing more targeted care to those who would have otherwise gone to the emergency room. That's a substantial savings for what turned out to be better, more appropriate care. Almost half of Americans have used telemedicine since the pandemic began, and nearly two out of three have found it more convenient than in-person care and appreciate both the time savings and the ability to limit exposure to other sick patients.

As we continue to look for ways to ensure access to quality health care for all populations, telemedicine could become an essential tool for our rural communities. Many Minnesotans live outside of a 30-minute drive to the nearest hospital, which, under pre-pandemic regulations, limited their options and access to care.

Through broad-based grassroots outreach, *Americans for Prosperity* (AFP) is driving long-term solutions to the country's biggest problems. AFP activists engage friends and neighbors on key issues and encourage them to take an active role in building a culture of mutual benefit, where people succeed by helping one another. AFP recruits and unites activists in 35 states behind a common goal of advancing policies that will help people improve their lives.

These changes were viewed by some as merely temporary, necessary only within the parameters of the massive health care response to the pandemic. But if temporarily removing these regulatory barriers to care helped improve the health of patients, helped deal with hospital capacity issues, and lowered costs, then why wouldn't we want those barriers to stay down permanently?

AFP-MN also supports ongoing conversations about addressing the issues around payment parity as well. Again, this is a bigger issue not limited only to telehealth. Any time that the state interferes with flexibility in business practices or mandates certain pricing structures or picks predetermined winners and losers, it is going to distort the market, and neither patients nor providers nor the state will see the full extent of the potential benefits in terms of quality of care or in cost savings.

It is our hope that both states and the federal government learn from these pandemic-related experiences and permanently remove unnecessary regulations on the delivery of telemedicine.

Thank you for your time and attention to these important issues. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions, need more information, or if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Flohrs', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Jason Flohrs
State Director
Americans for Prosperity - Minnesota