

April 6, 2020

Representative Tina Liebling
Chair, House Health Finance and Policy Committee

Delivered electronically

RE: Comments on HF 2128- Article 7- Telehealth

Dear Chair Liebling and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HF 2128. MNACHC appreciates the work done by the chair, the committee and staff to prepare the bill that support initiatives to create access and equity in Minnesota's health care system. Access to affordable primary health care continues to be at the core of the FQHC mission, as it has for over five decades. A vast majority, 80%, of our patients are either uninsured or enrolled in a public health care program such as Medical Assistance (MA) or MinnesotaCare.

The telehealth flexibility provided by the Legislature during the COVID-19 pandemic enables Health Centers to maintain primary care medical and behavioral health services for their patients. Health Center patients have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 as the general Health Center COCI-19 positivity rate is 17% (five times the statewide rate) and for BIPOC patients, a 25% rate.

This flexibility enables our patients, who often suffer the impacts of health disparities, to continue to access care at their Community Health Center. Patients are able to manage chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease or continue to engage with their behavioral health or substance use disorder (SUD) provider through telehealth services.

In rural areas of the state, the lack of broadband internet capacity prohibits interactive audio-video services for patients. Rural FQHCs maintain services to their patients during the pandemic with the use of audio-only visits. In urban areas, access to high-speed internet is also an issue in specific low-income neighborhoods, and many patients do not have access to the technology needed to facilitate an audio-video visit with their Health Center provider. **MNACHC requests that audio-only services continue as an effective strategy to address access barriers and ultimately, healthier communities.**

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at (651) 341-8487 or at rochelle.westlund@mnachc.org to further discuss this bill or Minnesota's FQHCs and how we can work together to increase access to affordable care.

Respectfully,

Rochelle Westlund, Director of Public Policy