

Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
c/o Christian Ricci
Cross Building, Room 220
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 323: *An Act Regarding Insurance Coverage for Telehealth Services*;
LD 333: *An Act Regarding Telehealth*; and
LD 849: *An Act To Make Permanent the Telehealth Reimbursement Options Passed by Emergency Measures*

Dear Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and other members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services,

I represent NASW Maine in support of LD 323, LD 333, and LD 849. In response to the public health emergency (PHE) of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maine relaxed restrictions on telehealth provision and authorized reimbursement for audio-only services. Reimbursing audio-only services has not only enabled residents to safely access critical mental and behavioral health services during the pandemic, but has alleviated significant barriers for some Mainers that will still exist in the future (NASW).

Maine's rural, aging, and other low-income populations are most likely to benefit from continued telephone access to telehealth services (NASW). Affordable, accessible broadband is a barrier to receiving care for populations who, due to circumstances or health/mental health conditions, can not use video conferencing. The following are important points to consider:

- 83,000 or more households in Maine do not have adequate broadband access (State of Maine), which makes video conferencing a significant barrier to receiving telemental health services; and
- Only 4.5% of Maine households have access to wired internet of at least 25mbps download speed and 3mbps upload speed that costs \$60 or less per month (BroadbandNOW Research).

With stable internet access inaccessible or unaffordable for many households, Maine needs to ensure continued access to care as our economy reopens by maintaining expansions in telehealth policies enacted in response to the PHE, including reimbursement for audio-only services. The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for years to come, and Maine needs to keep telehealth accessible.

I urge you all to vote "Yes" on LD 323, LD 333, AND LD 849.

Respectfully submitted,

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Policy Committee Co-Chair
NASW Maine
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Exact References:

BroadbandNow Research: <https://broadbandnow.com/research/best-states-with-internet-coverage-and-speed>

NASW, Medicare Reimbursing for Audio-Only Psychotherapy:
<https://www.socialworkers.org/News/News-Releases/ID/2145/Medicare-Now-Reimbursing-for-Audio-Only-Psychotherapy>

NASW & Others, Sign-on Letter for the DHHS and the CMS:
<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=JjwfXndy9PU%3D&portalid=0>

NASW & Others, Sign-on Letter for Sustaining Telehealth Services:
https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=d_HXct-60bA%3D&portalid=0

State of Maine, Broadband Action Plan January 2020:
https://www.maine.gov/connectme/sites/maine.gov.connectme/files/inline-files/Plan_Action_2020.pdf