



Physicians Caring for Texans

House Committee on Insurance
Testimony Supporting House Bill 1726 (Telehealth Payment Parity)
by Rep. Ana Hernandez
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Thank you, Chair Oliverson and committee members, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dr. Thomas Kim. I am a physician here in Austin, testifying in support of House Bill 1726 on behalf of myself and the Texas Medical Association.

In preparing my testimony, I experienced a wide range of feelings from gratitude and pride to uncertainty and concern. Allow me to explain.

I have the great good fortune of having worked in telehealth for nearly two decades. A lot has changed over the years, but one constant is believing that our most precious resource is ourselves. Improving the health of all Texans is more than a vision but a necessary foundation to successfully navigate a world of increasing complexity, scarcity, and need. Supporting my patients and helping others to be the right doctor with the right information at the right time is the thing I am most grateful for in my professional life.

I also am proud of the strategic leadership found in Texas. In 2017 after decades of nurturing the field, this legislative body had the foresight to reframe telemedical care as medical care. In 2019, we achieved “service parity.” At that point, without being overly prescriptive, telemedicine became a means to a covered service so long as the now unified regulatory expectations were met.

Then came the global pandemic. The “gift” of the pandemic was a boon born out of necessity. We paused regulatory restrictions to continue to care for one another. The result was an accelerated evolution that we are still processing to this day. What we know is that every discipline found a way to maintain therapeutic relationships in some way. We also saw a natural settling-out period where caregivers utilized telehealth approximately one-third of the time. We also discovered near-universal satisfaction with telehealth’s ability to improve timeliness, efficiency, reach, and more.

This brings us to today and the public health emergency set to expire next month. HB 1726 again demonstrates strategic leadership during uncertain times. We are facing a rollback that without guidance and support will lead to demonstrable harm for an untold number of Texans. This bill seeks to preserve the economic engine that will support telehealth as a care option best determined by the caregiver involved. To be clear, telehealth is still NOT a silver bullet. Nor is it a replacement for conventional care. But in the right moment with the right information and with the right physician (your physician) we have a chance of finding that better version of ourselves.

I do not mean to suggest that I can predict an uncertain future. But I can say that allowing an environment that denies or reduces the payment for telehealth will result in a return to only conventional options that are widely seen as inadequate or absent for far too many Texans. I know telehealth will play a critical role in tomorrow's health care system. Passing HB 1726 today ensures that we will have the fuel to make it to the top of this next hill. Beyond that, there will be more hills, but as Texans, we will persist as we always have.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.