



**Testimony in Support  
May 6, 2021**

- LD 323 An Act Regarding Insurance Coverage for Telehealth Services**
- LD 333 An Act Regarding Telehealth**
- LD 849 An Act To Make Permanent the Telehealth Reimbursement Options Passed by  
Emergency Measures**
- LD 863 An Act To Have Maine Join the Interstate Psychology Interjurisdictional  
Compact To Improve Telehealth Options for Psychologists and Their Patients**
- LD 1681 An Act Regarding Telehealth Services for Certain Licensees of the Office of  
Professional and Occupational Regulation and Certain Licensees Affiliated with the  
Department of Professional and Financial Regulation**

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN, I am here today providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations to speak in support of telehealth bills before the committee today. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with over 12,000 employees statewide.

Northern Light Health is proud of our clinical and technology expertise as a leader in the provision of telehealth services to the people of Maine. With our experience we worked in partnership with legislators to create a dedicated MaineCare telehealth benefit and modernizing commercial carrier coverage of telehealth services. We never envisioned how important this work was until COVID-19 transformed telehealth allowing us to care for thousands of individuals at home during the pandemic. In February of 2020 Northern Light Health provided 1500 telehealth encounters this grew to over 33,000 monthly encounters in May of 2020 and today we continue to provide a significant volume of telehealth encounters averaging over 20,000 per month.

Our telehealth services lines have expanded to include pre-post-surgical care, rheumatology, cardiology, neurology, gastroenterology, orthopedics, oncology, women's health, pediatrics and primary care and behavioral health. Our patients have also responded positively to telehealth care with 60% responding positively to telehealth care. Twenty one percent respond negatively, and this is focused on lack of adequate internet connectivity.

Expanding telehealth during the pandemic period also identified coverage policy changes that needed to be implemented via waivers and declarations to effectively meet the needs of patients receiving telehealth services. The bills before you today transition these changes to permanent coverage policy.

Northern Light Health  
Government Relations  
43 Whiting Hill Road  
Brewer, Maine 04412

**Office** 207-861-3282  
**Fax** 207-872-2030

**Northern Light Health**

Acadia Hospital  
A.R. Gould Hospital  
Beacon Health  
Blue Hill Hospital  
C.A. Dean Hospital  
Eastern Maine Medical Center  
Home Care & Hospice  
Inland Hospital  
Maine Coast Hospital  
Mercy Hospital  
Northern Light Health Foundation  
Sebastacook Valley Hospital

**Telephonic Coverage** – Nearly all of the bills transition audio only service into the definition of telehealth as a covered service. We are all well aware of the broadband challenges in many parts of Maine. Individuals in these areas do not have the bandwidth to support a quality video telehealth encounter. In these instances’ audio only communication is essential to support providers contacting their patients to address various health care needs. We also learned that audio communication is a preferred method for some of our patients. We are in full support of including audio only communication as a permanent telehealth covered service. Should the committee decide that the provider must document why audio only is the means of telehealth communication, we ask that this be recorded once in the record and not a requirement for each and every encounter. We further support changes in LD 323 that strikes from the current law facsimile machine, email or texting as excluded from the definition of telehealth. These are means of communicating clinical information and the current language creates confusion particularly when clinical information is transmitted between providers via secure email communication.

**Consent** – LD 323 includes language that is specific to the MaineCare program allowing patients to provide verbal, electronic or written consent for telehealth services. MaineCare provided temporary flexibility for verbal consent and it is important that verbal consent continues as permanent policy. It is highly disruptive to interject paper mandates into an technology-based environment of care.

**Payment Parity Including Reimbursement & Deductibles** – The bills before you today retain payment parity that was mandated during the pandemic period and we are full support of making parity permanent policy. It is an incorrect assumption to think that provider costs of telehealth are lower than an in-person encounter. We actually have new costs related to telehealth including zoom customer service teams for patient education and troubleshooting and expanded roles for clinical support staff pre- telehealth visit, during the encounter and post telehealth visit.

**Prescription Medications** – LD 333 states that the carrier may not place any restriction on the prescribing of medication through telehealth by a provider whose scope of practice includes prescribing medication that is more restrictive than any requirement in state and federal law for prescribing medication through in-person consultation. We are in full support of this language. During the pandemic patients receiving telehealth encounters received prescriptions for medications to address their particular medical conditions and it is important that this continue post pandemic.

**Telehealth Covered Services** – LD 1681 allows a variety of licensed and registered professionals to provide necessary health services via telehealth. The bill includes a number of professionals employed by Northern Light Health including psychologists, counselors, clinical social workers, therapists and more. We support transitioning the services provided to permanently covered telehealth services post pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the important telehealth bills before you today.