



May 3rd, 2022

The Honorable Dafna Michaelson Jenet
Chair, Colorado House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee
Colorado House of Representatives
200 E Colfax Ave., Room #307
Denver, CO 80203

The Honorable Emily Sirota
Vice Chair, Colorado House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee
Colorado House of Representatives
200 E Colfax Ave., Room #307
Denver, CO 80203

RE: ATA COMMENTS ON SENATE BILL 22-181

Dear Chair Michaelson Jenet and Vice Chair Sirota:

On behalf of ATA Action, I am writing you to comment on Senate Bill 22-181 as it relates to telehealth.

ATA Action, the American Telemedicine Association's affiliated trade association focused on advocacy, advances policy to ensure all individuals have permanent access to telehealth services across the care continuum. ATA Action supports the enactment of state and federal telehealth policies to secure telehealth access for all Americans, including those in rural and underserved communities. ATA Action recognizes that telehealth and virtual care have the potential to truly transform the health care delivery system – by improving patient outcomes, enhancing safety and effectiveness of care, addressing health disparities, and reducing costs – if only allowed to flourish.

Senate Bill 22-181 would require the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) in the Department of Human Services to create and implement a behavioral health care provider workforce plan by September 1, 2022. Among other things, the proposed legislation would also require the Division of Professions and Occupations in the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) to make recommendations to expand the behavioral health care practice through telehealth.

ATA Action sees this workforce plan as an opportunity to make recommendations that will promote the proliferation of telehealth in Colorado and ensure that Colorado patients have access to high-quality, affordable care on a permanent basis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, patients across the country benefitted from the expansion of telehealth services, receiving physical and mental health services whenever and wherever they needed it. Innovative telehealth technologies – including real-time, audio-visual modalities, asynchronous technologies, and remote patient

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monitoring devices – connected more patients to more providers than ever before. In the process of prompting these connections, telehealth technologies eliminated arbitrary geographic barriers between patients and their preferred providers, saved patients time and money by allowing them to receive their health care from work or at home, and enabled patients in rural and underserved communities the ability to access care easily and efficiently.

With the country still suffering through an unprecedented mental health crisis, it is essential that legislatures and state agencies recognize the benefits that a permissive approach to telehealth would afford patients. Enabling behavioral health providers to use the full range of appropriate telehealth technologies when delivering telehealth services, allowing for the establishment of patient-provider relationships via telehealth technologies, and granting licensure flexibilities to behavioral health providers licensed and in good standing in other states are just a few provisions which would expand the behavioral health care workforce in Colorado and make it easier for providers to reach patients in need.

Thank you for your support for telehealth. We urge the Legislature to consider these points when outlining the objectives of the behavioral health workforce in the interest of expanding Colorado patients' access to affordable, high-quality behavioral health care. Please consider ATA Action a resource for the work of the task force. If you have any questions or would like to engage in additional discussion regarding the telehealth industry's perspective, please contact me at kzebley@ataaction.org.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Zebley", written over a light grey circular watermark.

Kyle Zebley
Executive Director
ATA Action



May 3, 2022

Dear Members of the House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of SB22-181. On behalf of Children's Hospital Colorado, we are pleased to share our support and urge you to vote YES on this important bill. We are thankful for the work of the Behavioral Health Transformational Task Force in developing this bill as well as the bill sponsors, Rep. Cutter and Rep. Van Beber, and stakeholders who strengthened the bill to ensure that funding is deployed immediately to help support Colorado's behavioral health workforce.

In May 2021, Children's Hospital Colorado declared a state of emergency for pediatric behavioral health, and unfortunately the challenges continue. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Colorado lacked sufficient services and supports across the care continuum to provide necessary services for children and youth. During the legislative session, this committee has considered many important bills to expand the care continuum and create a behavioral health system that is transparent, accountable, and coordinated. However, without a sufficient workforce, these efforts will be difficult to implement and may not meet their intended transformational goals.

Healthcare workers have been at the forefront of the pandemic for over two years, and given the current behavioral health crisis among children and youth, the system is stretched. The behavioral healthcare workforce in Colorado has never been sufficient to meet the need, and it cannot keep up as the demand continues to grow. For example, not a single county in Colorado has enough practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists to serve their population, and 49 out of 64 counties have no practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists.

SB22-181 ensures that resources are deployed across the state to support and diversify the workforce immediately through programs such as loan repayment, scholarships, and additional training. The bill also expands the workforce through paid job shadowing and internships, and by funding peer support professionals and behavioral health aides. The bill also lays the foundation for long-term workforce recruitment efforts by requiring the Behavioral Health Administration to work with other departments to reduce administrative burden and align career pathways to be more responsive to the needs of the state.

Thank you for your commitment to the behavioral health workforce that serves Colorado's children and youth. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

Zach Zaslow, Director of Government Affairs
Children's Hospital Colorado
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