



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

Testimony in SUPPORT for H 7149
Vimala Phongsavanh, Senior Director, External Affairs
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
Rhode Island House Committee on Health and Human Services
Thursday, February 8, 2024

Chair Donovan and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Vimala Phongsavanh, Senior Director, External Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) testifying in support of raised House Bill 7149 *An Act relating to Health and Safety – Uniform Telehealth Act*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves nearly 9,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services at our Rhode Island health center. Planned Parenthood believes all people should have access to quality, affordable health care as a basic human right— regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

At PPSNE, we know people’s sexual and reproductive health care can’t wait—especially during a public health crisis. As our state’s health care system was impacted by the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, patients in Rhode Island were often left with the difficult decision to potentially defer care and treatment. Telehealth services prevent delays and setbacks in care that could impact people’s long-term health for years to come. PPSNE telehealth services expand access to high-quality and affordable sexual and reproductive care, especially for those who often face systemic barriers to health care and or who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Our ability to offer telehealth as an option to provide essential sexual and reproductive health care and primary care services was crucial then and we continue to see the benefit for our patients. Our experience has shown that patients overwhelmingly appreciate the flexibility and availability in access, making high-quality and cost-effective preventive health care available by phone or video to residents across the state, no matter how far they live from one of our health centers. As a provider serving patients across both Connecticut and Rhode, H 7149 would benefit the delivery of care for Planned Parenthood health care providers. In our last fiscal year 5% of all visits totaling 4698 were through telehealth. — reaching patients who might otherwise have struggled to take time off or arrange transportation or childcare to come in-person to a health center.

All people need and deserve equal access to comprehensive health care, including sexual and reproductive health care. Telehealth has been one option to ensure continued access to care at PPSNE for thousands of patients throughout the pandemic and beyond. Care through telehealth is an important option for our patients which is why we support House Bill 7149 *An Act relating to Health and Safety – Uniform Telehealth Act* to give health care providers to deliver care to patients in Rhode Island. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important legislation.

Vimala Phongsavanh, MPA
Senior Director, External Affairs
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
175 Broad Street, Providence, RI 02903
vimala.phongsavanh@ppsne.org