

February 7, 2020

Chair Cyrus Habib, Vice Chair Karen Keiser,
Ranking Member Mark Schoesler
Members of the Washington State Senate Rules Committee
220A Legislative Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0466

RE: Stop SB 5759 & Secret Back Room Deals - WA State Medical Professionals Should Be Making Decisions About Ocular Telemedicine

Dear Chair Habib, Vice Chair Keiser, Ranking Member Schoesler and the Distinguished Members of the Washington State Senate Rules Committee:

We write today on behalf of millions of Washington state consumers, taxpayers, innovators, companies, medical professionals and community groups to urge you to stop SB 5759, a bill to ban ocular telemedicine in the State of Washington that would prevent patients from getting their contact lens and glasses prescriptions renewed online and from having the ability to get online vision checks.

We are deeply concerned by the secretive closed-door process that occurred in the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee this past week. The substitute bill was rushed forward with no opportunity for public input and very little ability for Committee members to understand what was in the bill. This at a time when the Washington State Telemedicine Collaborative - a body created by the WA State Legislature in 2015, is undergoing a comprehensive review of ocular telemedicine, a review that was part of an agreement between Committee members and the sponsors of SB 5759 last year.

As you all will remember, the Legislature created the Collaborative through the adoption of SB 6519, sponsored by Chair Cleveland and Senator Becker. As directed in the language of SB 6519, the Collaborative's mission is to enhance the understanding and use of health services provided through telehealth and other similar models in Washington state.

It is further charged with developing recommendations to improve reimbursement and access to services, including originating site restrictions, provider to provider consultative models, and technologies and models of care not currently reimbursed; identify the existence of telehealth best practices, guidelines, billing requirements, and fraud prevention developed by recognized medical and telehealth organizations; and explore other priorities identified by members of the collaborative.

The goal of the collaborative is to explore and make telehealth technology recommendations, and their professional guidance is vital before any decision on ocular telehealth is made. Having the Collaborative review ocular telemedicine, takes this decision out of the arena of politics and allows

Washington State medical professionals and telemedicine experts to give policymakers substantive guidance and advice.

As you may be aware, our Coalition has been working to stop a ban of ocular telemedicine in Washington State for many years. We reached out at the beginning of the 2020 session to urge the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee to wait to act on any bill banning ocular telemedicine until the Collaborative finishes their review. We recently presented in front of the Collaborative and it is our understanding that optometry and ophthalmology associations have been invited to do the same at their next meeting. Instead of following the Collaborative process, a secretive bill that was not shared with stakeholders was rushed through in Executive Session, ignoring the advice and counsel of the panel of telemedicine experts that they used taxpayer funds to create.

We can only assume that there has been tremendous pressure on Health and Long-Term Care Committee members from the optometric lobby who have a vested financial interest in preventing new technologies and innovations from moving forward and who seek to have the legislature act to stifle any competitors in the marketplace.

On behalf of all your constituents who wear contact lens and glasses, all those who have worked so hard to promote health care innovation in Washington state, and all those who do not have access to an eye doctor in rural and urban parts of the state, we urge you to stop SB 5759, to resist attempts to ban telemedicine in this year's legislative session and reject premature efforts to limit or regulate telemedicine and online prescription renewal for contact lenses and glasses until this review is complete.

Sincerely,



