



November 16, 2021

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair
House Ways & Means Committee
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues
Chair
Senate Ways & Means Committee
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Daniel Hunt
Chair
House Committee on Federal Stimulus
& Census Oversight
State House, Room 166
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman
Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House, Room 208
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Todd Smola
Ranking Member
House Ways & Means Committee
State House Room 124
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Patrick O'Connor
Assistant Minority Leader
Massachusetts Senate
State House, Room 419
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues and Honorable Committee Members:

The tMED Coalition and its members wish to express its gratitude and appreciation for the funding to support equitable and affordable broadband adoption, infrastructure improvements, and digital literacy programming to close the digital divide included in both **HB.4234** and **SB. 2564, An Act Relative to Immediate COVID-19 Recovery Needs**. As a coalition that advocates for expanded access to telehealth services, we have noted significant barriers in accessing such care for communities that lack digital literacy. This is of particular importance from a health equity perspective, especially as telehealth grows in its utilization. Initial statewide data indicates that the utilization of telehealth for certain patient populations increased by 5,100% in March 2020 when compared to March 2019¹. The digital divide ultimately results in a healthcare divide.

¹ <https://heller.brandeis.edu/mass-health-policy-forum/categories/public-health/pdfs/telehealth-in-a-post-pandemic-world/telehealth-in-a-post-pandemic-world-issue-brief-12-3-2020.pdf>

To address this existing and likely growing disparity, the tMED Coalition **respectfully encourages you to support the language adopted by the House in section 4 of HB4234 in lines 1384-1386 that seeks to expand digital literacy for residents experiencing economic hardship including those who have taken advantage of the federal communication commission's (FCC) emergency broadband benefit program and the FCC's lifeline program.** This language would prioritize funding for those populations who have experienced increased barriers in accessing healthcare and telehealth services, including those disproportionately affected by COVID-19, the elderly, patients of color,² and those who may need assistance with telehealth services due to limited English proficiency or limited literacy with digital health tools. From a provider perspective, there is tremendous clinical benefit to patients and administrative benefit to practices in having increased technological and other support available to patients accessing care via telehealth and ensuring that they are literate in the use of these devices with the goal of improving their own health.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this matter. We appreciate the Legislature's thoughtful deliberation regarding the use of ARPA funding and for your consideration of these funds as an important intervention for health equity for our patients.

If you have any questions, please contact Leda Anderson, Esq., MMS's Legislative Counsel for Advocacy, Government & Community Relations, at landerson@mms.org, or Allie Cataldo, MHA's Manager of State Government Affairs, at acataldo@mhalink.org.

Members of the tMED – The Massachusetts Telemedicine Coalition

- Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association
- Massachusetts Medical Society
- Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
- Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals
- Massachusetts Council of Community Hospitals
- Hospice & Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts
- American College of Physicians – Massachusetts Chapter
- Highland Healthcare Associates IPA
- Health Care For All
- Organization of Nurse Leaders
- HealthPoint Plus Foundation
- Massachusetts Association of Behavioral Health Systems
- Massachusetts Academy of Family Physicians
- Seven Hills Foundation & Affiliates
- Case Management Society of New England
- Massachusetts Association for Occupational Therapy
- Atrius Health
- New England Cable & Telecommunications Association
- Association for Behavioral Healthcare
- National Association of Social Workers – Massachusetts Chapter

² A May 2020 Kaiser Family Foundation issue brief noted that, nationally, just 42% of African-American Medicare beneficiaries own a computer (compared to 71% of those who are white).

- Massachusetts Psychiatric Society
- Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium
- Digital Diagnostics
- Zipnosis
- Perspectives Health Services
- Bayada Pediatrics
- American Heart Association / American Stroke Association
- Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts
- Mass. Family Planning Association
- BL Healthcare
- Phillips
- Maven Project
- Upstream USA
- Cambridge Health Alliance
- Heywood Healthcare
- Franciscan Children's Hospital
- American Physical Therapy Association – Massachusetts
- Community Care Cooperative
- Fertility Within Reach
- Virtudent
- Resolve New England
- Massachusetts Association of Mental Health
- AMD Global Telemedicine
- hims | hers
- Asian Women for Health