

**Session:** 67<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly, Regular Session (2021)  
**Bill:** SB 2179 (as amended)  
**Committee:** House of Representatives, Human Services Committee  
**Hearing:** Monday, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 3:15 p.m.  
**Testimony:** Written Only  
**Witness:** Brian Balstad, Lobbyist for North Dakota Psychological Association

Chairman Weisz and Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Brian Balstad. I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the North Dakota Psychological Association (“NDPA”), the professional association for psychologists in the State of North Dakota.

Telehealth serves an important role in providing mental health services for North Dakotans. Telehealth has made mental health services accessible to North Dakotans living in rural areas and North Dakotans with limited mobility. It has made mental health services accessible to North Dakotans during the COVID-19 pandemic without risking harm to the patient/client, mental health service provider, or the public. It has made mental health services more accessible to North Dakotans overall. It is for these reasons NDPA has supported and continues to support telehealth.

The mental health services provided using telehealth are the same mental health services provided in-person yet some insurance companies provide lower rates of reimbursement, i.e. pay less, for mental health services provided using telehealth than for mental health services provided in-person. Thus, not only do mental health service providers incur additional cost to provide mental health services using telehealth, mental health service providers are also paid less for mental health services provided using telehealth. Moreover, some insurance companies have different requirements regarding coinsurance, copayments, deductibles, and utilization management for mental health services provided using telehealth. As mental health services provided using telehealth are the same mental health services provided in-person, the rates of reimbursement and

the requirements regarding coinsurance, copayments, deductibles, and utilization management should be the same.

NDPA supports studying the disparate treatment of mental health services provided using telehealth, and therefore, NDPA supports SB 2179 as amended. Also, if a study is conducted, NDPA would like to participate in the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for the opportunity to submit written testimony.