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March 15, 2021

Rep. Robin Weisz
Chair, House Human Services Committee
North Dakota State Capitol
600 E Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Chairman Weisz,

On behalf of Medica, I want to express our position regarding SB 2179, which enacts a number of changes with respect to telehealth. Medica has covered telemedicine, telehealth, and virtual care services for years and have medical processes in place to outline the instances under which we cover these services. As a nonprofit health plan, we are mission-driven to improve the health of the communities we serve by making health care accessible and affordable for our membership. We support SB 2179, as amended, which seeks to study the issue of payment parity as a means for helping lawmakers understand the cost implications of the approach the original bill sought to enact.

Medica supports the ability of plans to contract with providers in ways that maximize quality and value for our members. We believe telemedicine, telehealth, and virtual care services can be an innovative modality of care during the public health emergency and in the future. However, the amount paid for these services versus in-person services should continue to be determined by our contracts with health care providers, not dictated by state law. We view the study of payment parity in the bill as amended as a fair compromise with the proponents of the bill and support its continued inclusion.⁴

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to socially distance increased the need and use of providing health care services via telehealth. Like many other health plans across the country, Medica voluntarily opted to reimburse health care providers for telehealth visits at the same rate under which we would reimburse for the same service delivered in an in-person setting. The purpose of this temporary increase was an acknowledgement that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans may decide, or may be required to, receive care in such alternative settings in order to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 to themselves and their family members.

Looking forward, Medica supports the approach of allowing health plans to work directly with providers to build on those strategies that work, with a focus on preserving accessibility and affordability.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our concerns, and are happy answer any questions related to our concerns.

Respectfully,

Matt Schafer

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