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Comments to Chair Colleen Burton and members of the Senate Health Policy Committee regarding SB 298 – Telehealth Practice Standards

My name is Dominic M. Calabro and I am President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit, taxpayer research institute & government watchdog which, for over 42 years, has worked hard to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of Florida government and promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

Since 2014, Florida TaxWatch has researched and supported the expansion of telehealth (see [Critical Connections to Care](#) and [Telehealth in Florida: Where We Are and What is Next](#)) and our work has consistently found that telemedicine provides a way for Florida to increase self-sufficiency, contain costs, and improve health care access and outcomes. **Telemedicine can be used to increase access to quality care, and it can also be used as an innovative tool to reduce costly medical interventions such as emergency room utilization and length of hospital stay.**

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to make telehealth as accessible as practicable and that experience showed that telehealth is a viable alternative. Telehealth helps reach audiences that may otherwise be unable to access care and provides the opportunity to improve patient care, treatment, education, and services, and ultimately bend the cost curve.

In its [2016 Final Report](#), the constitutionally created Florida Government Efficiency Task Force recommended **eliminating the remaining barriers to thoughtful expansion of telehealth as a way to save Florida taxpayers billions in healthcare costs annually.** In 2019, the Legislature enacted statutes governing the provision of telehealth but barriers to its effective use remain.

SB 298 addresses one of those barriers: expanding the definition of telehealth to include audio-only telephone calls.

Florida's demographic changes and health care needs increasingly call for a viable alternative to in-person medical consultation. As Florida's Medicaid enrollment and spending grows, and an aging population increasingly needs to access quality health care, the development of a statewide telehealth infrastructure is a critical step toward the physical and fiscal health of our state.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues on this and other issues this session. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and, most of all, thank you and your family for your selfless public service to our state's taxpayers.