



Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

Comments to the Honorable Colleen Burton, Chair, and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee regarding HB 17 --- Telehealth

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 more than 40 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 has highlighted the opportunity- and the need- to make telehealth as accessible as practicable. 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 [June 2016 Final Report](#), the constitutionally created Florida Government Efficiency Task Force recommended **eliminating the remaining barriers to 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.

HB 17 addresses one of those barriers-- expanding the authorization for telehealth providers to prescribe drugs.

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.

Our recent experience with pandemic care has borne out that telemedicine is a viable alternative.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues as we continue to enhance Florida's telehealth infrastructure.