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**As a Maryland cardiovascular professional, and on behalf of my patients I, urge you to support SB 3/HB 123, the Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the way that medical care is delivered in Maryland. Physicians and care teams were directed by the state and by health systems to drastically curtail face-to-face office visits and non-emergent elective procedures in order to slow the spread of the coronavirus. In this new environment, telehealth became an essential component of health care delivery, enabling patients to keep in contact with their physicians and for important health decisions to be made. The desire of some patients to maintain distance has led them to continue to request telehealth visits regardless of the degree of community spread or positivity rate. Indeed, some patients have grown to prefer telehealth for some visits to reduce travel time and cost, as well as inconvenience, particularly patients who rely on family members or neighbors for transport.

Importantly, not all patients have access to the digital bandwidth and/or computer equipment to allow a secure and stable video connection during a telehealth visit. Maryland cardiologists have found this to be a common problem, with numerous telehealth visits disrupted by connectivity issues, forcing a pivot to audio-only connection. We know that lack of bandwidth and computer equipment disproportionately affects minority communities, the elderly, and low-income households. In addition, when a physical examination is not essential, the most important elements of medical assessment and decision-making can be accomplished with an audio-only connection.

**SB 3/HB 123** maintains and expands telehealth parity with in-person office visits and requires parity between video- and audio-only telehealth through June 30, 2025 for both public and private health insurers. This is important and far-sighted legislation that will help outpatient practices maintain financial viability and, most importantly, allow patients to continue to receive medical care regardless of the state of the pandemic, weather, or ability to obtain transportation. It is also an important step to reduce disparities in access to care.

Sincerely,