



JAMES L. MADARA, MD
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, CEO

ama-assn.org
t (312) 464-5000

October 20, 2017

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
United States House of Representatives
124 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Thompson:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to express our support for H.R. 2123, the “Veterans E-Health and Telemedicine Support (VETS) Act of 2017,” as introduced. The AMA supports expanding veterans’ access to clinically validated telehealth services within the VA.

This legislation would authorize physicians and other health care professionals who are employed directly by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and have at least one valid state license to provide telehealth services to VA beneficiaries without regard to the location of the patient or the health professional. This bill would address the significant and unique need to expand access to health care services for Veterans being treated within the VA system while also ensuring that important patient protections remain in place, including the direct oversight, accountability, training, and quality control specific to VA-employed physicians and other health care professionals. Also, under such a system, VA-employed physicians and other VA-employed health care professionals are able to rely on the VA’s telehealth infrastructure (including hardware and software) pioneered by the VA to ensure that access to telemedicine services meet and exceed the standard of care.

Importantly, the bill does not authorize a contracted physician or other health care professional who is not directly employed by the VA to provide health care services via telemedicine to a VA patient located in a state in which the contracted physician or other health care professional is not licensed. This is consistent with the VA’s recently proposed rule expanding telehealth services within the VA which explicitly provides that multi-state licensure expansion for providing telehealth services applies only to VA employed providers and will not be expanded to contracted physicians or providers. A contracted physician providing health care services via telemedicine would still be required to be licensed in the state where the VA patient is being treated. This structure of accountability provides protections for VA patients receiving health care services outside a VA facility, whether in person or via telemedicine, by ensuring that the appropriate licensing boards have authority over the contracted physician or other health care professional in the state where the patient is located. Without such protections, should VA patients be subject to services that fall short of the standard of care, they would have limited recourse under their own state’s medical practice and patient safety laws and regulations.

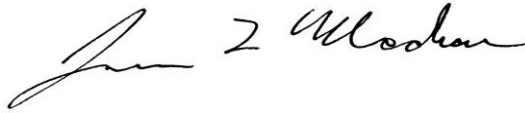
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The AMA is committed to advancing patient access to care through new innovations, including telemedicine, and commends you for your leadership in expanding access to VA patients.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L Madara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Madara, MD