

Hi Senator Lyons,

I note that testimony will be heard for S.244 tomorrow. I would like to voice my support of this bill.

I am a Radiation Oncologist, I practice out of UVM Medical Center in Burlington, and I treat patients from as far south as Rutland and as far North as Richford, along with patients from Washington and Lamoile counties. The portion of the bill my practice is mostly affected by pertains to equivalent reimbursement of audio only telephone visits for patients. My patients come from long distances. Telephone visits allows for better access to care. The most vulnerable face many challenges in coming for a visit, long distances, time, lack of a vehicle or inability to drive, cost. Many can not participate in video visits due to lack of reliable internet access, lack of appropriate device or the savvy to use a device they might own. These barriers are compounded for elderly and low income Vermonters, who frequently have more complicated medical problems and require more care. There are many things we can address appropriately by phone such as discussion of laboratory and imaging results. For patients who are deciding about radiation, it is also frequently appropriate for us to have ongoing discussion by phone, where I can answer questions. I use my same training and experience in these visits as I do for video and in person visits, and it is most appropriate that I be reimbursed the same. When phone only visits are not reimbursed the same, they are generally not done, except in extenuating circumstances. Patients and health care providers both have the option to have an in person visit if a phone only visit is inadequate. I think this improves access and allows me to meet my patients where they are.

I also support increasing primary care payments as also introduced in this bill. Strong primary care is cost effective and results in a healthier patients, I think this is the best place to put health care dollars if we want a healthier population.

Thanks for introducing this bill.

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