



**Office of
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For Immediate Release

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**Representative Kane supports expanded telehealth options
and rate parity for Massachusetts residents**

Rep. Kane amendments to increase access to cancer clinical trials and to create a Rare Disease Advisory Council in Massachusetts included in final bill headed to Governor

BOSTON – State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) recently supported comprehensive health care legislation that will allow Massachusetts residents to access telehealth services at rates comparable to in-person doctor visits.

Senate Bill 2984, *An Act promoting a resilient health care system that puts patients first*, was enacted by the House of Representatives on a vote of 157-0 on December 23, and by the Senate on a voice vote. The bill, which represents a compromise negotiated by a six-member House and Senate conference committee appointed in July, is now before Governor Charlie Baker, who has 10 days to review the bill and act on it.

Representative Kane said that in addition to establishing rate parity for telehealth services, Senate Bill 2984 provides consumers with protections against out-of-network “surprise” medical billing. It also expands the scope of practice for optometrists and certain nursing professionals, while enhancing coverage for COVID-19 testing and services, reimbursements for cancer clinical trials, and treatment coverage for certain childhood diseases.

Under Senate Bill 2984, public and private insurers will be required to provide reimbursements on a permanent basis for behavioral health services delivered via telehealth at the same rate as behavioral health services provided in-person. The bill also mandates that telehealth services for primary care and chronic disease care be reimbursed at the same rate as in-person visits for the next two years, and keeps telehealth rates for other services in place until 90 days after the Governor’s declared March 10, 2020 State of Emergency is lifted.

To protect patients from unexpected and costly medical bills, Senate Bill 2984 requires health care providers to notify patients of their network status before a non-emergency procedure takes place so patients can make more informed health care decisions. Health insurance carriers will also be required to provide a toll-free number patients can use to obtain information on an individual provider’s network status.

Representative Kane noted that Senate Bill 2984 will allow nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists and psychiatric nurse mental health clinical specialists to practice independently by treating patients and prescribing medications if they have practiced under a doctor's supervision for at least two years, bringing Massachusetts policies in line with other New England states. The bill also allows optometrists to treat glaucoma, which is currently the practice in every other state in the country except Massachusetts.

As the state continues to deal with the global coronavirus pandemic, Senate Bill 2984 will require the Group Insurance Commission, MassHealth and commercial carriers to cover all COVID-19-related emergency, inpatient services and cognitive rehabilitation services – both in-network and out-of-network – without imposing any cost-sharing requirements. This coverage will also extend to medically necessary outpatient testing for asymptomatic individuals, including those working in certain high-risk jobs.

Representative Kane was successful in securing two amendments to the bill. The first will increase access to cancer clinical trials by allowing cancer patients participating in a clinical trial to be reimbursed for reasonable travel and accommodation expenses associated with the clinical trial. The aim is to make cancer clinical trials more accessible and reduce harmful economic and racial disparities. Representative Kane filed and sponsored this amendment as well as the bill (H4211) this session in which the amendment language was based.

The second amendment to the healthcare bill that Representative Kane filed and secured will create a Rare Disease Advisory Council to advise the Governor, the Legislature, and DPH on the incidence of rare disease in Massachusetts. It defines a rare disease as one that “affects fewer than 200,000 people in the United States, has status as an orphan disease for research purposes, or is known to be substantially under diagnosed and unrecognized as a result of lack of adequate diagnostic and research information.” The amendment was based in a bill (H4268) Representative Kane co-sponsored this session alongside Representative Joe McKenna.

The health care bill also requires commercial health insurers, hospital service corporations, medical service corporations and HMOs to cover treatment for Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS) and Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS) beginning in 2022, and establishes a PANDA/PANS Advisory Council to advise the Department of Public Health (DPH) on research, diagnosis, treatment and education relating to the disorder and syndrome.

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