

May 29, 2020

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schatz:

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, our clinician partners – including more than 270,000 affiliated physicians, 2 million nurses and other caregivers – and the 43,000 health care leaders who belong to our professional membership groups, the American Hospital Association (AHA) writes in support of the Health Care Broadband Expansion During COVID-19 Act, which proposes improvements to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Rural Health Care Program.

Telehealth has provided a critical way for patients to continue to access needed care during the COVID-19 pandemic. We support the introduction of this bill, which would provide an additional \$2 billion in funding for the Rural Health Care Program. The Rural Health Care Program provides funding to hospitals and health care providers for broadband services necessary for the provision of telehealth. Currently, the program provides a 65% subsidy to providers to offset communication costs. We greatly appreciate that the proposed legislation would increase the subsidy to 85%, allowing additional resources to be directed toward telehealth programs. Despite playing a critical role in expanding broadband, the program has been administratively burdensome for providers. This legislation simplifies the program to allow for more efficient application processes and disbursement of much needed funding.

While some in-person services always will be needed, improved access to telehealth will ensure that only those patients who absolutely require in-person visits leave their homes for medical care. Doing so will help hospitals and health systems care for more patients and reduce potential exposure to COVID-19 positive patients for health care professionals and the public. We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working together to ensure passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/

Thomas P. Nickels
Executive Vice President

