



25th Navajo Nation Council

June 10, 2024

The Honorable Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez
1510 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: The Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024

Dear Congresswoman Leger Fernandez:

The Health, Education and Human Services Committee (“**HEHSC**”) of the 25th Navajo Nation Council writes to express their support for the *Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024*. It is our duty to work continuously to improve the health of Navajo citizens residing both within and outside our tribal lands, and this legislation would greatly assist tribes in continuing the current quality of care and improving it by allowing both rural and urban Indian health programs to continue to receive audio-only telehealth past 2024.

The Navajo Nation is one of the largest tribes in the United States. We have over 400,000 members and our lands cover over 27,000 square miles stretching across parts of what is now Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. With a land base that is larger than the state of West Virginia, travelling for in-person medical care can take some of our citizens hours of driving. These roads can be particularly hazardous in the winter. Ensuring that audio-only telehealth visits continue past 2024 will safeguard the health of our citizens by allowing them to reach their providers even when the roads will not allow them to do so otherwise. It is particularly important that this bill emphasizes audio-only telehealth visits, as most of our people do not have access to broadband or suffer from low broadband connectivity, but everyone can visit a neighbor to borrow a cell phone.

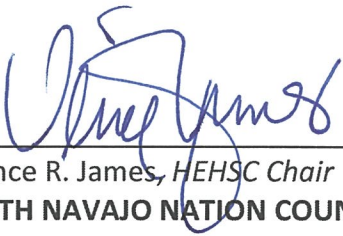
The COVID-19 Pandemic fundamentally changed the country’s approach to health care. After the Public Health Emergency (“**PHE**”) was declared, Medicare began reimbursing the Indian Health Services (“**IHS**”) for certain audio-only telehealth services that could be provided to Medicare beneficiaries. This decision was crucial, allowing Navajo to access their preferred providers from home, and thus lowering the risk of exposure to the disease. This program also proved to be vital for rural communities apart from the pandemic and letting the extension lapse would be a mistake. The HEHSC of the 25th Navajo Nation Council supports extending the pandemic-era telehealth flexibilities through the *Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024*.

The committee supports the *Telehealth Access for Tribal Communities Act of 2024* in specific due to the following reasons: we approve of the services the act covers, including any audio-only

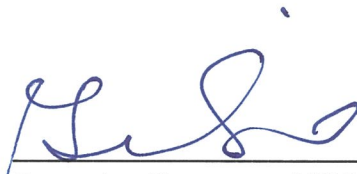
telehealth service that was payable under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule as of the date of enactment of the Consolidated Appropriations Act; we approve of the fact that the act removes originating site requirements; and we approve that it ensures continuity of Medicare coverage for audio-only telehealth services.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions, or require additional information, please contact Ms. Angelita Benally Legislative Advisor for the Office of Legislative Services in the Navajo Nation Legislative Branch at (928) 871 -7254 or by email at angelitabenally@navajo-nsn.gov. *Ahéhee'* and thank you.

Sincerely,



Vince R. James, *HEHSC Chair*
25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL



Germaine Simonson, *HEHSC Vice Chair*
25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL