

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

**S.** \_\_\_\_\_

To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to protect access to telehealth services under the Medicare program.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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Mr. MANCHIN (for himself, Ms. ERNST, Mrs. SHAHEEN, and Mr. MORAN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

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**A BILL**

To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to protect access to telehealth services under the Medicare program.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Protecting Rural Tele-  
5 health Access Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. ELIMINATION OF RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO**  
7 **TELEHEALTH SERVICES.**

8 (a) **ELIMINATION OF GEOGRAPHIC REQUIREMENTS**  
9 **FOR ORIGINATING SITES.**—Section 1834(m)(4)(C) of the

1 Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)(C)) is  
2 amended—

3 (1) in clause (i), in the matter preceding sub-  
4 clause (I), by striking “clause (iii)” and inserting  
5 “clauses (iii) and (iv)”; and

6 (2) by adding at the end the following new  
7 clause:

8 “(iv) ELIMINATION OF GEOGRAPHIC  
9 REQUIREMENTS FOR ORIGINATING  
10 SITES.—The geographic requirements de-  
11 scribed in clause (i) shall not apply with  
12 respect to telehealth services furnished on  
13 or after January 1, 2025.”.

14 (b) ELIMINATION OF RESTRICTIONS IN WHICH  
15 TELEHEALTH SERVICES MAY BE FURNISHED IN THE  
16 HOME.—Section 1834(m)(4)(C)(ii)(X) of the Social Secu-  
17 rity Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)(C)(i)(X)) is amended to  
18 read as follows:

19 “(X)(aa) For the period begin-  
20 ning on the date of the enactment of  
21 this subclause and ending on Decem-  
22 ber 31, 2024, the home of an indi-  
23 vidual but only for purposes of section  
24 1881(b)(3)(B) or telehealth services  
25 described in paragraph (7).

1                                   “(bb) For the period beginning  
2                                   on or after January 1, 2025, the  
3                                   home of an individual.”.

4           (c) **ELIMINATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON STORE-AND-**  
5 **FORWARD TECHNOLOGIES.**—The second sentence of sec-  
6 tion 1834(m)(1) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C.  
7 1395m(m)(1)) is amended by striking “in the case of any  
8 Federal telemedicine demonstration program conducted in  
9 Alaska or Hawaii,”.

10 **SEC. 3. TELEHEALTH FLEXIBILITIES FOR CRITICAL ACCESS**  
11 **HOSPITALS.**

12           Section 1834(m) of the Social Security Act (42  
13 U.S.C. 1395m(m)) is amended—

14                   (1) in the first sentence of paragraph (1), by  
15                   striking “and (9)” and inserting “(9), and (10)”;

16                   (2) in paragraph (2)(A), by striking “paragraph  
17                   (8)” and inserting “paragraphs (8) and (10)”;

18                   (3) in paragraph (4)—

19                           (A) in subparagraph (A), by striking  
20                           “paragraph (8)” and inserting “paragraphs (8)  
21                           and (10)”;

22                           (B) in subparagraph (F)(i), by striking  
23                           “paragraph (8)” and inserting “paragraphs (8)  
24                           and (10)”;

1           (4) by adding at the end the following new  
2 paragraph:

3           “(10) TELEHEALTH FLEXIBILITIES FOR CRIT-  
4 ICAL ACCESS HOSPITALS.—

5           “(A) IN GENERAL.—On or after the date  
6 of the enactment of this paragraph—

7           “(i) the Secretary shall pay for tele-  
8 health services that are furnished via a  
9 telecommunications system by a critical ac-  
10 cess hospital, including any practitioner  
11 authorized to provide such services within  
12 the facility, that is a qualified provider (as  
13 defined in subparagraph (B)) to an eligible  
14 telehealth individual enrolled under this  
15 part notwithstanding that the critical ac-  
16 cess hospital providing the telehealth serv-  
17 ice is not at the same location as the bene-  
18 ficiary, if such services complement a plan  
19 of care that includes in-person care at  
20 some point, as may be appropriate;

21           “(ii) the amount of payment to a crit-  
22 ical access hospital that serves as a distant  
23 site for such a telehealth service shall be  
24 determined under subparagraph (C); and

25           “(iii) for purposes of this subsection—

1                   “(I) the term ‘distant site’ in-  
2                   cludes a critical access hospital that  
3                   furnishes a telehealth service to an eli-  
4                   gible telehealth individual; and

5                   “(II) the term ‘telehealth serv-  
6                   ices’ includes behavioral health serv-  
7                   ices and any other outpatient critical  
8                   access hospital service that is fur-  
9                   nished using telehealth to the extent  
10                  that payment codes corresponding to  
11                  services identified by the Secretary  
12                  under clause (i) or (ii) of paragraph  
13                  (4)(F) are listed on the corresponding  
14                  claim for such critical access hospital  
15                  service.

16                  “(B) DEFINITION OF QUALIFIED PRO-  
17                  VIDER.—For purposes of this subsection, the  
18                  term ‘qualified provider’ means, with respect to  
19                  a telehealth service described in subparagraph  
20                  (A)(i) that is furnished to an eligible telehealth  
21                  individual, a critical access hospital that has an  
22                  established patient relationship with such indi-  
23                  vidual as defined by the State in which the indi-  
24                  vidual is located.

1           “(C) PAYMENT.—The amount of payment  
2           to a critical access hospital that serves as a dis-  
3           tant site that furnishes a telehealth service to  
4           an eligible telehealth individual under this para-  
5           graph shall be equal to 101 percent of the rea-  
6           sonable costs of the hospital in providing such  
7           services, unless the hospital makes an election  
8           under paragraph (2) of section 1834(g) to be  
9           paid for such services based on the methodology  
10          described in such paragraph. Telehealth services  
11          furnished by a critical access hospital shall be  
12          counted for purposes of determining the pro-  
13          vider productivity rate of the critical access hos-  
14          pital for purposes of payment under such sec-  
15          tion.

16           “(D) IMPLEMENTATION.—Notwithstanding  
17          any other provision of law, the Secretary may  
18          implement this paragraph through program in-  
19          struction, interim final rule, or otherwise.”.

20 **SEC. 4. EXTENDING MEDICARE TELEHEALTH FLEXIBILI-**  
21 **TIES FOR FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH**  
22 **CENTERS AND RURAL HEALTH CLINICS.**

23          Section 1834(m)(8) of the Social Security Act (42  
24          U.S.C. 1395m(m)(8)), as amended by section 4113(c) of

1 division FF of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023  
2 (Public Law 117–328) is amended—

3 (1) in subparagraph (A), in the matter pre-  
4 ceding clause (i), by inserting “, and on or after  
5 January 1, 2025” after “December 31, 2024”;

6 (2) by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting  
7 the following:

8 “(B) PAYMENT.—

9 “(i) IN GENERAL.—A telehealth serv-  
10 ice furnished by a Federally qualified  
11 health center or a rural health clinic to an  
12 eligible telehealth individual pursuant to  
13 this paragraph or after the date of the en-  
14 actment of this subparagraph shall be re-  
15 imbursemented under this title at a separate  
16 telehealth payment rate as determined  
17 under the methodology established by the  
18 Secretary pursuant to clause (ii).

19 “(ii) PAYMENT METHODOLOGY.—The  
20 Secretary shall establish a methodology for  
21 determining the appropriate payment rate  
22 for telehealth services described in clause  
23 (i). Such methodology shall consider—

1                   “(I) the geography of Federally  
2 qualified health centers and rural  
3 health clinics;

4                   “(II) costs associated with the  
5 delivery of such telehealth services as  
6 allowable costs for the center or clinic;  
7 and

8                   “(III) the full cost of providing  
9 the services via telehealth.

10                   “(iii) IMPLEMENTATION.—

11                   “(I) CODING SYSTEM.—The Sec-  
12 retary shall establish an effective cod-  
13 ing system for telehealth services de-  
14 scribed in clause (i) that is reflective  
15 of the services provided at a center or  
16 clinic.

17                   “(II) IMPLEMENTATION.—Not-  
18 withstanding any other provision of  
19 law, the Secretary may implement this  
20 subparagraph through program in-  
21 struction, interim final rule, or other-  
22 wise.”; and

23                   (3) by adding at the end the following new sub-  
24 paragraph:



1                   “(C) REQUIREMENT DURING ADDITIONAL  
2 PERIOD.—

3                   “(i) IN GENERAL.—Beginning on Jan-  
4 uary 1, 2025, payment may only be made  
5 under this paragraph for a telehealth serv-  
6 ice described in subparagraph (A)(i) that  
7 is furnished to an eligible telehealth indi-  
8 vidual if such service is furnished by a  
9 qualified provider (as defined in clause  
10 (ii)).

11                   “(ii) DEFINITION OF QUALIFIED PRO-  
12 VIDER.—For purposes of this subpara-  
13 graph, the term ‘qualified provider’ means,  
14 with respect to a telehealth service de-  
15 scribed in subparagraph (A)(i) that is fur-  
16 nished to an eligible telehealth individual, a  
17 Federally qualified health center or rural  
18 health clinic that has an established pa-  
19 tient relationship with such individual as  
20 defined by the State in which the indi-  
21 vidual is located.”.

1 **SEC. 5. ALLOWANCE OF CERTAIN TELEHEALTH SERVICES**  
2 **FURNISHED USING AUDIO-ONLY TECH-**  
3 **NOLOGY.**

4 Section 1834(m)(4) of the Social Security Act (42  
5 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)) of the Social Security Act (42  
6 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)) is amended by adding at the end  
7 the following new subparagraph:

8 “(G) TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM.—

9 “(i) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding  
10 paragraph (1) and section 410.78(a)(3) of  
11 title 42, Code of Federal Regulations (or  
12 any successor regulation), subject to clause  
13 (v), on or after January, 2025, the term  
14 ‘telecommunications system’ includes, in  
15 the case of the furnishing of a specified  
16 telehealth service (as defined in clause (ii))  
17 a communications system that uses audio-  
18 only technology.

19 “(ii) SPECIFIED TELEHEALTH SERV-  
20 ICE.—In this subparagraph, the term  
21 ‘specified telehealth service’ means a tele-  
22 health service described in clause (iii) that  
23 is furnished by a qualified provider (as de-  
24 fined in clause (iv)).

25 “(iii) TELEHEALTH SERVICE DE-  
26 SCRIBED.—Subject to clause (vi), a tele-

1 health service described in this clause is a  
2 telehealth service consisting of—

3 “(I) evaluation and management  
4 services;

5 “(II) behavioral health counseling  
6 and educational services; and

7 “(III) other services determined  
8 appropriate by the Secretary.

9 “(iv) QUALIFIED PROVIDER DE-  
10 FINED.—

11 “(I) IN GENERAL.—For purposes  
12 of clause (ii), the term ‘qualified pro-  
13 vider’ means, with respect to a speci-  
14 fied telehealth service that is fur-  
15 nished to an eligible telehealth indi-  
16 vidual—

17 “(aa) a physician or practi-  
18 tioner who has an established pa-  
19 tient relationship with such indi-  
20 vidual as defined by the State in  
21 which the individual is located; or

22 “(bb) a critical access hos-  
23 pital (as defined in section  
24 1861(mm)(1)), a rural health  
25 clinic (as defined in section

1 1861(aa)(2)), a Federally quali-  
2 fied health center (as defined in  
3 section 1861(aa)(4)), a hospital  
4 (as defined in section 1861(e)), a  
5 hospital-based or critical access  
6 hospital-based renal dialysis cen-  
7 ter (including satellites), a skilled  
8 nursing facility (as defined in  
9 section 1819(a)), a community  
10 mental health center (as defined  
11 in section 1861(ff)(3)(B)), or a  
12 rural emergency hospital (as de-  
13 fined in section 1861(kkk)(2)).

14 “(v) AUTHORITY.—For purposes of  
15 this subparagraph, the Secretary may de-  
16 termine whether it is clinically appropriate  
17 to furnish a specified telehealth service via  
18 a communications system that uses audio-  
19 only technology and whether an in-person  
20 initial visit (in addition to any requirement  
21 with respect to the furnishing of an item  
22 or service in person pursuant to clause  
23 (iv)(I)) is required prior to the furnishing  
24 of such service using such technology.

25 “(vi) REVIEW.—

1                   “(I) IN GENERAL.—Not later  
2 than 5 years after the date of the en-  
3 actment of this subparagraph, the  
4 Secretary shall conduct a review of  
5 the furnishing of specified telehealth  
6 services through audio-only technology  
7 pursuant to this paragraph. Such re-  
8 view shall include an analysis of the  
9 impact of the roll out of broadband  
10 technology and whether the use of  
11 audio-only technology is necessary to  
12 ensure access to such telehealth serv-  
13 ices.

14                   “(II) REDETERMINATION OF  
15 SPECIFIED TELEHEALTH SERVICES.—  
16 The Secretary may, based on the re-  
17 view conducted under subclause (I),  
18 provide for the addition or deletion of  
19 services (and HCPCS codes), as ap-  
20 propriate, to those specified in clause  
21 (ii) that may be furnished using  
22 audio-only technology and authorized  
23 for payment pursuant to this subpara-  
24 graph.

1                   “(vii) CLARIFICATION REGARDING  
2                   PAYMENT.—The amount of payment for a  
3                   specified telehealth service that is fur-  
4                   nished using audio-only technology shall be  
5                   equal to the amount that would have been  
6                   paid for such service under this subsection  
7                   had such service been furnished via any  
8                   other telecommunications system author-  
9                   ized under this subsection.”.

10 **SEC. 6. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING EXPANSION OF**  
11 **ELIGIBLE PRACTITIONERS THAT MAY FUR-**  
12 **NISH TELEHEALTH SERVICES.**

13           It is the sense of Congress that the expansion of eligi-  
14 ble practitioners that may furnish telehealth services (as  
15 defined in section 1834(m)(4)(F) of the Social Security  
16 Act (42 U.S.C. 1395m(m)(4)(F))) during the emergency  
17 period described in section 1135(g)(1)(B) of such Act (42  
18 U.S.C. 1320b-5(g)(1)(B)) should be extended on a perma-  
19 nent basis.