

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Sophie Walsh 271-3469

HB 72, extending the commission to study telehealth services.

Hearing Date: March 26, 2025

Time Opened: 10:00 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:12 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Rochefort, Avard, Birdsell, Prentiss and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: None

Bill Analysis: This bill directs the commission to study telehealth services to submit a supplemental report by June 30, 2026, and provides for repeal of the commission on that date.

Sponsors:

Rep. Edwards

Rep. Palmer

Rep. Mandelbaum

Who supports the bill: Chase Eagleson (NH Council on Developmental Disabilities), Elizabeth Sargent (NH Pharmacists Association, NH Society for Health-System Pharmacists & NH Academy of Audiology), Lara McIntyre (Granite State Home Health and Hospice Association), Holly Stevens (NAMI NH), NH Nurse Practitioners Association, B Widger, Janelle Havens, Megan Thompson, Ann Rettew, Gary Devore, Andrew Jones, Lyssa Bayne-Kim, Phil Hatcher, Shea Flanagan, Nancy Linsley, A Thomas, Patricia Kasparian, Sarah Picard, Ryan Picard, Susan Garcia, Jillian Dubois, Lois Cote, Theresa Caney, Krystal Caney, Janna Biggs, Susan Moore, Stefanie Griffin, Russell A. Siggelkoe, Hilary Babon, Micheline Hagan, Benjamin Stinson, Ashley DePreaux, Allison Lane, James Hil, Judith Jones (NH Alliance for Healthy Aging), Nancy Zink-Mailloux, and Kenneth Mailloux.

Who opposes the bill: No one.

Who is neutral on the bill: Jonathan Ballard, MD (DHHS).

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Kevin Avard, Senate District 12

- Senator Avard introduced the bill on behalf of Representative Edwards.

- This bill directs the Commission to Study Telehealth Services to submit a supplemental report by June 30, 2026, and provides for repeal of the Commission on that date.

Holly Stevens, NAMI NH

- Ms. Stevens stated that she is speaking in support of this bill.
- The Commission was originally established in 2020, and she has served as a representative from a non-profit social service organization representing patients' perspective since then.
- The Commission was frequently presented with claims data demonstrating that mental health professionals, psychotherapists, and substance use counselors provide approximately half of their client services through telehealth. This data further indicated that 80-90% of all telehealth visits in New Hampshire are behavioral health related.
- Ms. Stevens emphasized that telehealth plays a critical role in mental health services across the state, particularly in the north and west where the provider shortage is more severe.
- The Commission's findings confirm that telehealth remains a valuable tool in healthcare delivery, particularly in mental health services. It also has been effective in expediting treatment for acute physical health conditions.
- Given the evolving nature of telehealth, the Commission recommended that their work be extended for an additional two years.

Jonathan Ballard, MD, Department of Health and Human Services

- Dr. Ballard stated that he has served on the Commission since its inception as a representative of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and served as Chair for its final two years.
- There are several identified areas warranting continued study, including improvements in health outcomes, cost efficiency, and service accessibility.
- Dr. Ballard emphasized that New Hampshire is an aging state, with a growing number of individuals requiring home health services. Emerging technologies in telehealth could significantly enhance home health services.
- Members of the Home Health Association provided testimony to the Commission that telehealth is currently used to assess when an individual requires a home health visit versus when remote monitoring is sufficient.
- Dr. Ballard explained that there are also promising models being implemented in other states, such as the 'hospital-to-home' model, which prevents hospitalization and allows patients to be discharged earlier while continuing to receive comparable telehealth-based care.
- Senator Rochefort inquired about Dr. Ballard's role on the Commission, and Dr. Ballard confirmed that while the Commission is now expired, he was a member

and served as Chair in the final two years. If this legislation is passed, it remains undetermined who will represent DHHS.

- Senator Rochefort expressed interest in expediting the Commission's recommendations to facilitate legislative action.
- Senator Birdsell asked if additional duties should be incorporated into the Commission's scope.
- Dr. Ballard explained that the current language provides sufficient flexibility for the Commission to explore all relevant aspects of telehealth.
- Dr. Ballard also acknowledged the potential benefits of telehealth in correctional settings.

Representative David Nagel, Belknap – District 6

- Representative Nagel stated that one of the most significant advancements in healthcare emerging from the pandemic is the expanded access to telehealth services.
- As a physician, some of his patients travel upwards of 200 miles from the Canadian border for a brief in-person appointment. Telehealth has dramatically improved his ability to provide care.
- Representative Nagel explained that he recently received a notification from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding policy changes. While this is not directly impacting New Hampshire, there can be indirect consequences on his ability to care for patients.
- Thus, it is important to monitor federal policy changes and ensure that New Hampshire remains aligned with evolving telehealth regulations to maintain access to quality healthcare.
- While telehealth is widely utilized for behavioral health services, Representative Nagel considers it imperative for the broader healthcare system as well.