



The ERISA Industry Committee

Driven By and For Large Employers

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Testimony of Annette Guarisco Fildes, CEO of ERIC Before the Arkansas House Committee on Public Health, Welfare, and Labor

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Annette Guarisco Fildes, and I am the President and CEO of The ERISA Industry Committee, also known as ERIC. ERIC represents large employers that provide benefits to workers and families in every state and community in the nation, including many in Arkansas.

ERIC has advocated for telemedicine legislation since 2015, engaging with state legislators and medical boards across the country, including in Texas and Arkansas. Each state has approached the issue somewhat differently, but all have the same goal of increasing access to quality health care for their residents, while striving to contain costs.

We are here to support H.B. 1220 to remove an important obstacle to telemedicine.

As background, ERIC is the only national association that advocates exclusively for large employers on health, retirement, and compensation public policies at the federal, state, and local levels. ERIC member companies are leaders in every sector of the economy, and we represent them in their capacity as sponsors of employee benefit plans *for their own workforce*.

Each of you and your constituents likely engage with an ERIC member company when you drive a car or fill it with gas, use a cell phone or a computer, visit a bank or hotel, fly on an airplane, watch TV, benefit from our national defense, shop at a standalone or mall store, receive or send a package, wear makeup, enjoy a soft drink, etc.

With workers in every state, ERIC member companies are keenly interested in public policies that impact the health care available to their employees.

They strive to provide high quality, affordable health care coverage to their millions of employees, retirees, and families and continually find new and innovative ways to improve health care in the communities where their employees live and work.

Large employers like ERIC members are the ones who advance onsite medical clinics, wellness programs, centers of excellence, patient-centered medical homes, and the use of technology to enable an individual to receive health care even when he or she is not in the physical presence of a provider.

We recognize the significant opportunity provided by telemedicine to modernize health care delivery and improve access to quality medical care.

Telemedicine minimizes the time spent for a health care provider visit, making it a great value to working parents, caregivers, and others struggling to balance work and family demands.

It also provides access to care for rural and urban populations, the elderly, disabled employees, and those with language barriers, chronic conditions, or transportation issues who might not otherwise be able to reach a provider.

Our large employer members offer telemedicine benefits to their employees.

I work directly with corporate leaders who design the health plans for their workforce. They tell me loud and clear that large employers want their employees to be able to access quality health care when and where they need it.

- They encourage *coordination* between the patient's telemedicine provider and primary care provider, and
- They understand that there will always be a need for a primary care physician and value that relationship; Telemedicine simply offers an OPTION for the patient
- And they do not want governments to favor one technology over another

ERIC has consistently supported technology-neutral requirements. In our view, government policies cannot keep up with the changing pace of technology. But *most importantly*, technology restrictions *impede access to care*.

Currently, to utilize telemedicine in Arkansas, a patient must first be seen by a provider *via video* along with a review of his or her medical record by that provider.

The video obstacle leaves a significant gap in coverage for those who live in rural areas where broadband may not be available, those who are not computer savvy, and those who cannot afford access to broadband.

This bill will provide those patients and many others access to health providers when and how they need it, changing their lives for the better.

We appreciate the work of the state to make telemedicine available. H.B. 1220 will take the next, most logical and appropriate step. The bill does one thing and one thing only: it allows a telemedicine visit with a patient located in the state by a physician who is licensed in Arkansas using *audio* along with a review of the patient's medical history *OR* using *video* along with a review of the patient's medical history.

This is a very straightforward and pragmatic bill and we support it.

All six states surrounding Arkansas allow for audio as long as the physician has access to the patient's medical history.

Large employers support consistency as it is important for their employees to have the same benefits across state lines and across the country.

Thank you for this opportunity to share the views of large employers. I would be happy to answer any questions.