



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

April 29, 2020

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Pursuant to Article IV, Section 15 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, I am returning herewith, without my approval, Senate Bill 857, Printer's Number 1388.

I recognize the importance of telemedicine and support actions to expand telemedicine access and use across the Commonwealth. Telemedicine is a valuable option in the delivery of health care services, especially during these trying times. However, it is crucially important to ensure this access is equitable and does not restrict medical treatment and services.

Physicians and their patients must be able to make choices about medical procedures based on best practices and standards of care, and telemedicine can be an important and accessible way to assist in making those choices. I supported a prior printer's number of the bill, but as amended in the House of Representatives, this legislation arbitrarily restricts the use of telemedicine for certain doctor-patient interactions. As amended, this bill interferes with women's health care and the crucial decision-making between patients and their physicians.

Furthermore, this legislation does not address the current need for telemedicine services during this COVID-19 emergency, when in-person interactions of so many kinds are inadvisable. My administration supported the inclusion of language to require health insurers to reimburse health care providers for the provision of needed telemedicine health care services during this health emergency, at the same rate as if they had been provided in person. Instead, this bill only requires the coverage and payment of telemedicine services to begin no sooner than 6 months after the effective date of the bill.

Given the potential for widespread transmission of COVID-19 across Pennsylvania, my administration has been taking a number of steps to ensure that patients in need of vital health care services are receiving them in a timely, safe, and appropriate manner. These steps expand and promote telehealth for physical health, behavioral health, and substance use disorder services and expand the use of telemedicine in the Medical Assistance Program and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

For the reasons set forth above, I must withhold my signature from Senate Bill 857, Printer's Number 1388.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Wolf".

Tom Wolf
Governor