



August 11, 2020

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 2206
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2164 (Rivas): Telehealth – SUPPORT AS AMENDED JULY 22, 2020

Dear Senator Portantino:

[Health Center Partners of Southern California \(HCP\)](#) is proud to support **AB 2164 (Rivas)** as amended July 22, 2020, and respectfully requests an “AYE” vote when this bill comes before you in committee.

Community Health Centers (CHCs) are leveraging telehealth and telephonic technology to improve access to care and meet increasing patient demands. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, CHCs used telehealth to overcome physical capacity limitations and existing socioeconomic barriers that prevented many patients from accessing care at Community Health Centers. But since the presence of COVID-19, CHCs implemented the DHCS telehealth and telephonic guidance to provide safe and rapid access to health care, while minimizing face-to-face visits, to protect both health care workers and patients.

CHCs are proving that telehealth is both safe and effective, and since COVID-19, a viable and critical solution to overcoming existing barriers to access to care. CHCs must be able to continue to integrate innovation and technology into their practice and clinical workflows to better serve their patients – to meet them where they are. ***Over the last 12 weeks, telehealth and telephonic encounters have accounted for an average of 65% of all patient visits among HCP’s 16 member organizations, which serve more than 850,000 patients each year for more than 3.6 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites, across San Diego, Riverside, and Imperial Counties.***

AB 2164 improves access to health care for low-income communities by ensuring CHCs can use telehealth to provide care to new patients in community settings, like schools and Head Start sites. AB 2164 allows CHCs to establish new patients through **both synchronous and asynchronous telehealth**, supporting the provision of care at safe and trusted community sites within their designated service areas using effective telehealth models. This necessary clarification enables CHCs to be more cost-efficient in serving patients. It removes the need for physicians, dentists, and other providers to travel to community sites solely to establish patients, which is costly and ultimately delays access to care.

The populations served by CHCs are especially vulnerable to gaps in care, as oftentimes referrals to specialists require additional appointments, time off work, travel, or other challenges that can be



barriers to care. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that **now more than ever** CHCs require innovative tools to reach patients outside of their four walls, to better protect health care workers and patients. If CHCs are provided the opportunity to innovate and are equipped with the necessary accompanying technical support, telehealth services will offer California’s underserved population numerous benefits during and after this public health crisis.

For these many reasons, Health Center Partners respectfully requests your “AYE” vote when it comes before you in committee.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you further on this important matter. Please let me know how Health Center Partners may be an asset to you, providing additional information about how CHCs are responding to the COVID-19 crisis in California, and the role they play in restarting California’s economy while supporting communities as they reopen to this new normal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henry N. Tuttle".

Henry N. Tuttle
President and CEO
htuttle@hcpsocal.org

cc: Members of Senate Appropriations Committee
Assemblymember Rivas
Assemblymember Salas

[Health Center Partners of Southern California](#), a family of companies, includes a 16-membership organization of federally qualified health centers, Indian Health Services Organizations, both urban and sovereign, and Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, collectively serving 850,000+ patients each year, for 3.6 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites across San Diego, Riverside, Imperial counties, with the seventh largest provider group in the region. Read our [2018/2019 Impact Report](#).