

Michael Stanley's Testimony
(approximately 4-5 minutes)

As CEO of Grace Health, I want to share my appreciation for the USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) grant awards in 2011, 2016, and most recently the 2018 Telehealth Equipment Funding for \$650,000 that includes \$154,000 in matching funds for an additional 9 School Based Health Sites, 7 Clinics Sites, and 6 Nursing Home Sites.

Grace Community Health Center d/b/a Grace Health is a Federally Qualified Health Center with primary care clinics serving Southeastern Appalachian Kentucky. Grace Health's priority is to serve the most vulnerable populations including children, older adults, pregnant women, and people with low-incomes. We accept Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance but also provide services on a sliding fee scale to those who are uninsured or under insured.

For Grace Health's USDA DLT project, the service area is located in southeastern Kentucky, near Virginia to the east and bordering Tennessee in the south and includes Bell, Clay, Knox, Leslie, Owsley and Whitley Counties. All of our service area counties have been designated as part of the federally designated eastern Kentucky Promise Zone designed to encourage economic and educational development in one of the nation's most impoverished areas. The counties are also designated as USDA StrikeForce Zone. The service area is located in the Eastern Coal Field region of the state and is comprised of rugged terrain composed of soaring mountains and verdant valleys.

Grace Health sees telemedicine as an opportunity to improve the work environment for health care providers and thus assist in provider retention. Innovative strategies such as telemedicine provide access to resources and support for both the patient and the provider giving the provider a more realistic chance of "making a difference" that isn't always possible when these resources are not accessible.

Grace Health has identified four primary needs to be addressed through telemedicine:

- 1) Access to Health Care Providers and Services
- 2) Transportation
- 3) Behavioral Health Treatment (Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment)
- 4) Patient Engagement.

To meet these needs, Grace Health has expanded telemedicine to 36 sites including six primary care clinics, one women's health clinic, nineteen school-based health centers, seven nursing homes, and one hospital. Services include primary care, consultations, behavioral health, and patient engagement. With telemedicine, rather than traveling to different clinics for different

services, patients are able to access most of the services they require at a clinic in their own community.

Using telemedicine, Grace Health's mental health providers have increased the number of patients served. Through telemedicine, our behavioral health providers have access to all of our primary care clinics as well as all of our school-based health centers. This increases the efficiency of our providers and greatly enhance services.

Grace Health has improved patient engagement by increasing access to care, providing supportive services and providing warm-handoffs through telemedicine. Access is the most basic form of patient engagement. Telemedicine helps us to increase our access points for services. When it is easier to access care, patients are more likely to receive the services they need to manage their health.

As of July 1, 2019, Kentucky's new telehealth rules for Medicaid and Commercial Health Plans help sustain telehealth programs through reimbursement of telehealth services. Kentucky is now a telehealth parity state. If a clinical encounter is reimbursable when conducted in a traditional in-person visit, that same encounter will be reimbursable when conducted via telehealth technology. This includes all services, providers and locations and the value of a telehealth encounter is equivalent to a traditional in-person encounter unless the payer and provider have negotiated a reduced payment rate.

In my personal opinion, telehealth is part of the answer to our primary care physician shortage in the rural underdeveloped areas of our country. I'm grateful for the opportunity to partner with the USDA DLT program. And, I'm committed to the success of this program that will improve the health care outcomes of your constituents that are our patients.