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# Telehealth Bill Irks FMA

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By [CAROL GENTRY](#)

A Florida House bill that would promote "telehealth" - patient care from a distance - passed a key committee Monday by a unanimous vote. It provoked an outcry from the Florida Medical Association.

The bill, (**HB 751**), would allow patients to be diagnosed and treated from afar using high-quality video linkups without requiring clinicians to first get a Florida license, a time-consuming and expensive chore. As long as the practitioners were licensed in their home state and registered with the state of Florida, the bill would let them practice telehealth.



Rep. Mia Jones, D-Jacksonville

That, says Florida Medical Association contract lobbyist David Custin, would be dangerous. So would the fact that nurse practitioners and other non-doctors would be included, he said.

"This is not commerce; we're not selling widgets," Custin said. "This is health care. It's different, okay? There are reasons there are protections in statute."

Matt Hudson, R-Naples, said eight counties in Florida have no hospital and in lots of communities, physicians are scarce.

"You know what? Those tired old excuses we've been hearing for decades? I think it's time we let them go," Hudson said.

The bill passed the House Select Committee on Work Force Innovation unanimously, with many members acknowledging it needs tightening up. Its co-sponsors, Jacksonville Democrat Mia Jones and Orange Park Republican Travis Cummings, promised to work with FMA to address objections.

Jones appeared to surprise the doctors lobby group by introducing a "strike-all" amendment to her own bill, stripping out provisions that might put barriers in the way of developing the technology and a market for it.



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Doctors' groups have asked for telehealth legislation that would regulate the practice, but in their comments at hearings they have said they want lawmakers to:

- Limit it to M.D.'s or D.O.'s, doctors of osteopathic medicine.
- Require a telehealth doctor to obtain a Florida license to consult in or treat Florida patients.
- Mandate that insurers pay for telehealth sessions, preferably at the same rate as face-to-face visits. Some insurers have been reluctant to set up payment structures for a type of practice that doesn't exist in Florida law.

The bill skips any mention of pay requirements. Sponsors said they didn't want to cripple the natural growth of a market that should develop on its own, given the demand.

Jones said she has faith that it will, given what she saw on a trip to Alaska three years ago. There, she talked to doctors and nurse practitioners who frequently treated patients hundreds of miles away.

"I heard them speak of a world I could only wish for for my state," she said. "It was at that point that I began to work on telemedicine moving forward in Florida."

--Health News Florida is part of WUSF Public Media. Contact Editor Carol Gentry at 813-974-8629 (desk) or e-mail at [cgentry@wusf.org](mailto:cgentry@wusf.org). For more health news, visit [HealthNewsFlorida.org](http://HealthNewsFlorida.org).

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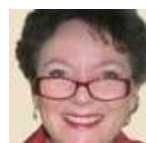
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