

HB 1420 Hospitals - Financial Assistance Policies and Bill Collections SUPPORT TESTIMONY

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Maryland Legislative District 45

Dear Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is James Morris. I'm a resident of Baltimore City for 67 years. I served in the United States Airforce from 1971 until 1975. My medical treatment is usually provided by the VA, but I sought dialysis treatment from Hopkins, which is supposed to be covered, in part, by the VA.

My experience with Hopkins is limited, other than the last two years I've only had the occasion to visit Hopkins one time. That was back in 1978. At that time I was fully insured. As an uninsured person I've visited Hopkins on three occasions in the last two years. The first being an incident related to dialysis for which I refused the treatment and I was billed \$91. for various tests. My biggest problem with that visit was a \$1,200 ambulance bill I was charged with from moving from one side of the East Baltimore facility to the other side of the same facility.

Second time was also related to dialysis, for which I followed the steps advised. That bill was almost \$30,000 dollars, which I am unable to pay.

The third time was related to a car accident, which I'm sure Hopkins will be fully reimbursed. I found out that the hospital had funds available for those who cannot pay or are unable to pay through the Coalition for a Humane Hopkins. So I was told by the collection agent that they would send me the information I needed to help pay the bill. I condemn their efforts because I was only told that I would be sent forms that I still have yet to receive.

Over the past year, I've heard from them three or four times. Each time, they said they would send me forms to receive financial assistance or to abate the bill. Each time they only asked me "How much can you pay?" At the time, I couldn't pay anything.

Coming home from dialysis one night, I ran into the Coalition for a Humane Hopkins outside the hospital. Being indebted to Hopkins, I was very interested in paying off the debt. I assembled the forms necessary. I sent the forms on January 8, 2020. All told, it took about three days to set up the forms necessary. I requested the form on a Friday and couldn't get the necessary form until Monday, at which point I needed to receive a relevant document from the Veterans Administration.

Hopefully, I will hear something back. Better yet, I hope the debt incurred will be forgiven.

Until I get my situation resolved, I don't have anything else to say, other than that I hope my story about difficulty involved in receiving financial assistance helps other patients at Hopkins and other hospitals.