



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 333
Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement
House Health and Government Operations

February 24, 2023

Dear Honorable Chair Peña-Melynk and Members of the Committee,

CASA, as a member of the End Medical Debt Maryland Coalition, is pleased to offer favorable testimony in strong support of HB 333 on Medical Reimbursement. CASA is the largest immigrant services and advocacy organization in Maryland, and in the Mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 120,000 Black and Latino immigrants and working families. This legislation represents an important step towards health equity and fair practices by implementing a process to reimburse hospital patients who were wrongfully billed by a hospital when they were eligible to receive free healthcare services.

CASA operates a robust Health and Human Services Department, where our offices work closely with undocumented Marylanders who are uninsured. The CASA health team helps thousands of immigrant and working-class families navigate the Health and Human Services System each year. From our case management assistance that connects members with social services to improve physical and mental health to our multilingual health hotline and medical interpreter program, to our comprehensive public benefits outreach and enrollment program - CASA is one of the leading and trusted organizations providing health support to the immigrant community. The majority of families we serve everyday lack access to health insurance programs and urgently need better, affordable options for care. Due to their lack of health insurance coverage receiving care while undocumented is extremely expensive for our immigrant families, the majority of who are also low-income. CASA is outraged by the data reported by Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC) that revealed Maryland hospitals to have wrongfully collected \$60 million from patients who should have received free medical care in both 2017 and 2018. These numbers were uncovered by the HSCRC in an analysis produced last year as a requirement of legislation passed by this committee in 2020. These hospitals are unethical and are violating their commitment to serve Marylanders by stealing from members of our communities who do not have funds to spare putting them further in debt and further affecting other aspects of their life.

Last year, the legislature passed HB694 requiring the HSCRC to convene a workgroup of all stakeholders to figure out the best process for refunding patients while also maintaining patient privacy and ensuring safe addresses were used for survivors of intimate partner bias. The workgroup met throughout the fall and there was a consensus among all parties that patients should be refunded. HB 333 ultimately puts hard-earned cash back in the hands of low-income Marylanders who were robbed by the hospitals that were supposed to care for them. This bill allows hospitals to right their wrongs. We cannot undo the past and the consequences of these wrongful billings but we can provide impacted patients with monetary relief now. CASA strongly urges this committee to issue a **favorable report for HB 333** to continue the work that this Committee has done toward equity for all especially our most vulnerable communities.