



Testimony on **HB328**
Hospitals – Financial Assistance Policies – Revisions
Position: **FAV**

My name is Ricarra Jones and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Maryland/DC. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, representing 10,000+ members in our region. 1199SEIU urges a favorable report on HB328 to eliminate barriers to hospital financial assistance for otherwise income eligible patients. This bill is crucial for expanding access to affordable healthcare in hospitals and reducing chronic illnesses.

Maryland's nonprofit hospitals are legally required, as a condition of their tax-exempt status, to provide free and reduced cost healthcare; and the State of Maryland uses global budgeting to assist with the cost of care. Therefore, Maryland's low-income patients should not be subject to geographic regional and asset tests to receive the affordable healthcare they are entitled to. Numerous studies have demonstrated that households without medical debt have improved health outcomes. Because low-income communities have disproportionate medical debt, reducing the burden of medical debt will help to foster health equity.

Short staffing in Maryland's hospitals is at a crisis point. Low-income patients often avoid seeking healthcare due to the cost, only going to the hospital when their condition is so severe that it is more difficult, time consuming and costly to treat. Improving low-income Marylanders' access to free or reduced cost healthcare may encourage them to seek care earlier, potentially shortening their hospital stays. Shorter hospital stays can reduce unbalanced worker-to-patient ratios and open hospital bed availability more quickly. This will ease the burden on workers in short staffed facilities and reduce the long Emergency Department wait times for patients.

The Medical Debt Protection Act of 2021 established that patients should not have to lose their homes over medical debt. HB328 follows that same logic. Just as a patient should not have their home foreclosed on for medical debt, a patient who is income eligible for financial assistance should not have to sell their home to access affordable care. This is particularly important for our quickly ageing population. Given the short staffing crisis in Long Term Care facilities, Maryland needs to ensure that elders who want to can "age in place."

Please vote YES on HB328.

In Unity,

Ricarra Jones

Political Director

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