

Subject: Support for House Bill 328 Ensuring Equal Access to Healthcare

Dear Health and Government Operations Committee,

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 328, a key piece of legislation addressing barriers to healthcare for income-eligible individuals in Maryland. The evidence highlighting the issue of hospitals denying financial assistance based on asset and service/geography tests underscores the need for this bill.

Currently, hospitals use asset tests to consider both income and monetary assets, potentially leading to denials of assistance. Moreover, service/geography tests allow hospitals to turn away income-eligible patients based on their location. House Bill 328 aims to rectify these problems, emphasizing that those qualifying for free or reduced-cost care should not be denied based on financial circumstances. The bill highlights Maryland's existing allocation of funds to hospitals for this purpose, making the expansion of healthcare access a fundamental piece.

Beyond addressing access, the bill strives for fairness in charity care provision. Presently, hospitals apply varying criteria for asset and service/geography tests, resulting in inequitable outcomes for income-eligible patients. House Bill 328 seeks to standardize these criteria, ensuring equitable treatment regardless of where medical assistance is sought. Additionally, the bill acknowledges the broader impact of reducing medical debt on household finances and overall health. By eliminating unnecessary tests for income-eligible patients, House Bill 328 contributes to financial and health equity, especially benefiting low-income communities, including individuals with disabilities who in many other ways experience significant barriers to health and independence.

The bill advocates for the sensible use of charity care. While Maryland's nonprofit hospitals receive funding for free and reduced-cost care, the current system allows for high rates of charity care denial. House Bill 328 aims to streamline this process, facilitating easier approval of applications without compromising hospitals' financial stability. House Bill 328 marks a significant stride towards creating a fair and accessible healthcare system in Maryland. I urge you to support this legislation to ensure that income-eligible individuals receive the necessary care, fostering equity and well-being across our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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