



To Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

As physicians, we are submitting this testimony in support of SB630. This legislation would help protect patients like ours and working families across Maryland who, under current Maryland law, can have a lien placed on their home just because of medical debt.

Health care costs are soaring across Maryland and, as a result, many families can't afford to pay their unexpected medical bills. In 2023, 14% of Maryland voters had a medical bill or medical debt that they or someone in their household could not pay. This issue hit Black-led households even harder, at a rate of 23% receiving an unaffordable medical bill.

Medical debt stems from a number of sources, including our state's nonprofit hospitals, outpatient services, such as physical therapy, diagnostic tests, or rehabilitative treatments, dentists, and more. Patients seeking routine care can end up with medical debt.

Unfortunately, patients with medical debt from basic health care can face aggressive collection tactics. Over a nine year period from 2009 to 2018, our state's nonprofit hospitals filed 145,746 lawsuits for medical debt, resulting in over 37,000 wage garnishments and more than 3,000 bankruptcies. The average amount of debt was \$945.

One particularly aggressive tactic is to place a lien against a patient's home. Nonprofit hospitals placed 4,432 liens on families homes in nine years. No Marylander should have their shelter or the ability to fix it put at risk because of medical debt. As doctors, we worry about their health should they lose their home, and also that they may refuse to seek further needed medical care.

SB630 would remove the ability to place liens on homes to collect medical debt, better protecting patients like ours. Eleven states and territories prohibit liens on primary residences. And three more prohibit filing liens against people who are ill or have disabilities.

By joining these states, Maryland can help ensure families' homes and equity aren't put at risk simply because they or a loved one fell ill. We urge you to support SB630 to help patients and all Marylanders dealing with medical debt. Thanks for your time and consideration of our testimony.

Signed:

Lisa Abrams, MD (Pikesville)

Wendy Bernstein, MD, COL MC USA, Retired (Rockville)

Ealena Callender, MD, MPH (Silver Spring)

Richard Cook, MD (Hughesville)

Henry Farkas, MD, MPH (Pikesville)

David L Meyers, MD (Baltimore)

Sally Pinkstaff, MD, PhD, FACP (Baltimore)

Christine Schneyer Englund, MD, MCI (Baltimore)