



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 875

Hospitals – Financial Assistance Policies and Bill Collections

Senate Finance Committee

March 5, 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
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Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
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League of Women Voters of Maryland
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Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
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St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 875, which increases hospital financial assistance to cover families at 200% of the federal poverty line – ensuring that members of such families will receive medically necessary care regardless of their inability to pay – and requires that a payment plan is available to uninsured patients with family incomes between 200% and 500% of the federal poverty level.

Many poor and working Marylanders cannot afford the rising cost of health care as the incomes of working people stagnate compared to medical inflation. A recent report found that a third of Americans postponed medical care due to costs – the vast majority of whom delayed treatment for a serious health condition.¹ Unsurprisingly, such delays were most common among lower-income households.² Beyond the financial costs borne by individuals, there are significant societal costs as a result of delayed medical treatment.³ Even after passage of the Affordable Care Act, medical bills frequently cause financial hardship and even destitution.^{4,5} One need look no further than GoFundMe, which proclaims itself to be “the leader in online medical fundraising” with over 250,000 campaigns a year – including in Maryland.⁶

SB 875 would reduce the financial barriers to needed health care, increasing the threshold from 150% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) under which Financial Assistance Policies provide free medically necessary care to patients, and requiring hospitals to provide payment plans to patients with incomes between 200% and 500% of the FPL. The bill would also ensure that hospitals screen for Financial Assistance Policy eligibility, and provide clear and accessible written and verbal notice of such hospital policies.

MAP appreciates your consideration, and strongly urges a favorable report on SB 875.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ Saad, L. (Dec 9, 2019). More Americans Delaying Medical Treatment Due to Cost. Gallup News. Available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/269138/americans-delaying-medical-treatment-due-cost.aspx>.

² Ibid.

³ Angelotta, C. & Lattie, E.G. (Dec 24, 2018). Delaying medical treatment is a higher societal cost. The Hill. Available at: <https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/422766-delaying-medical-treatment-is-a-higher-societal-cost>.

⁴ Hamel L, Norton M, Pollitz K, Levitt L, Claxton G, Brodie M. The burden of medical debt: results from the Kaiser Family Foundation/New York Times Medical Bills Survey. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/report/the-burden-of-medical-debt-results-from-the-kaiser-family-foundationnew-york-times-medical-bills-survey/view/print>.

⁵ David U. Himmelstein, Robert M. Lawless, Deborah Thorne, Pamela Foohey, and Steffie Woolhandler, 2019: *Medical Bankruptcy: Still Common Despite the Affordable Care Act*

American Journal of Public Health 109, 431-433, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304901>

⁶ GoFundMe. Get help with medical fundraising: with a free GoFundMe, you can get immediate help with medical bills. Available at: <https://www.gofundme.com/start/medical-fundraising>.