**PROGRESSIVE MARYLAND**

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## Testimony on Maryland HOUSE Bill SB0514:
## Medical Debt Protection Act

TO:          Senator Delores G. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Finance Committee
FROM:        Malcolm Heflin, Progressive Maryland Lead Baltimore City Organizer, Baltimore City, District 46
DATE:        Feb 23, 2021
POSITION:    SUPPORT

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB0514. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong SUPPORT FOR this bill.

Progressive Mayland has been tracking this issue since this effort started in 2019, and the need for reform has only grown more acute since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that this disease disproportionately affects Black, Brown, immigrant, and other underserved people and communities, the fact that lawsuits to recover medical debt also affects them in large numbers is cause for immediate concern and alarm. We also want to ensure that anyone needs healthcare.

75% of people who contract COVID-19 will have at least one long-term effect. That's going to mean even more people requiring access to even more healthcare. This also means that this problem will only grow exponentially if we don't do anything to address this problem *now*.

And while we have tens of thousands of Marylanders who have to make the choice between healthcare and bills that month, hospitals in Maryland are given generous tax breaks and millions of dollars in charity care funding specifically to provide healthcare to low-income people. From 2014-2018, hospitals had $119,214,617 in unspent charity care funding, which is almost the exact amount of money they sought in medical debt lawsuits during the same time-period.

Progressive Maryland is proud to be a member of the End Medical Debt Maryland coalition with 43 other labor, faith, and community groups across the state representing over 350,000 Marylanders. We, along with our coalition partners, are dedicated to continuing the fight against medical debt and *for* our neighbors and communities, until struggles with medical debt is something we only read about in history books.

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We urge a FAVORABLE report on **SB0514**.


Respectfully,
Malcolm Heflin, Coalition Co-Lead
End Medical Debt Maryland
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End Medical Debt Maryland Coalition Partners

1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition, Progressive Maryland, National Nurses United, Accessible Resources for Independence, Baltimore Women United, ATU Local 689, CASA in Action, Baltimore Teachers Union, CASH Campaign, Coalition Against Policing by Hopkins, Greater Baltimore DSA, Healthcare NOW of Maryland, Housing our Neighbors, IBEW Local 26, Lower Shore Progressive Caucus, Maryland Legislative Coalition, Maryland State AFL-CIO, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, MD/DC Alliance for Retired Americans, Not Without Black Women, Peer Wellness &amp; Recovery Services, Public Justice Center, SEIU 32BJ, Special Needs Navigator, Sunrise Baltimore, MICA Organizers and Activists, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, Maryland NAACP, Maryland Center on Economic Policy, UFCW Local 400, Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO, Our Revolution Maryland, The Freedom Center, Independence Now, Integrated Living Opportunities, Disability Rights Maryland, Patient Providers LLC, Women's Democratic Club of Montgomery County, FreeState Justice, M.E.Action, IUOE Local 37, Maryland Professional Employees Council Local 6197, Marylanders for Patient's Rights, and unaffiliated community members