

My name is Suzanne Doogan (D 43), writing on behalf of the Coalition Against Policing By Hopkins, composed of university groups and unaffiliated community groups, in support of the Medical Debt Protection Act (HB565). We urge you to vote for this bill and stand for the wellbeing of your constituents.

HB565 will protect Maryland residents from punitive medical debt lawsuits, and will ban hospitals from suing for medical debt \$1,000 and under. Notably, it will also require hospitals to provide a refund of certain amounts collected from the guarantor of a patient who was found eligible for reduced-cost care or service.

This bill is essential because every year thousands of Marylanders are sued by hospitals in our state and many of them are forced into precarious financial situations because of predatory collections. Instead of using its prestige and power to set a state-wide example for what equitable community care could look like, medical big-wig Johns Hopkins Hospital has targeted its employees and its primarily Black and poor neighbors, and sued them over debt averaging only \$1,438, which should be meaningless to such a profitable institution. Institutions, especially with a stated mission to “improve the health of the community” must not increase their wealth with funds accrued by disproportionately suing those closest to them -- disrupting their lives, dispossessing them, and terrorizing them.

There are three Johns Hopkins Hospitals -- Johns Hopkins Hospital near the Middle East neighborhood, Johns Hopkins Bayview, and a newly acquired Howard County General Hospital in Columbia. For about 145 years, Johns Hopkins Hospitals *and* Johns Hopkins University together have functioned as a powerful and profitable conglomerate institution in Baltimore. Though the Hopkins Health System is technically a non-profit, the Johns Hopkins Hospital near the Middle East *alone* pulled a gross patient revenue of \$2,505,590 last year according to the American Hospital Directory -- almost 13% of our 50+ state hospitals’ total gross patient revenue. The Hopkins Health System and the University are within the three largest private employers in the city.

Hopkins’s origins are rooted in slavery -- Johns Hopkins himself was a slaveholder. Suing patients for medical debt is another tool of racial oppression that is used to further uphold the uneven relationship that Hopkins institutions have already established between themselves and their neighbors in East Baltimore. (See also: Black East Baltimore resident Henrietta Lacks’ cells being used for highly profitable medical research without her consent in the 1950’s, and today, when Black families are removed sometimes house-by-house and sometimes block-by-block for more Hopkins expansion.)

In 2019, Hopkins successfully lobbied to have its own private armed police force. Plans indicate that the police would first be deployed in the Middle East neighborhood near the Hopkins Hospital. The Hopkins police force continues to be contested by unaffiliated community members, students, faculty, and employees. In fact, JHUPD is so unpopular that it is up for repeal in the House and Senate right now.

Hopkins could be using its money to improve *real* public health by simply not suing patients or putting liens on homes, instead of spending a fortune on policing. Even though we know policing has deadly outcomes, particularly for Black and Brown people, Hopkins’s argument for its private police force is public health and safety. Hopkins must provide its neighbors access to healthcare without the accompanying threat of eviction. And every hospital in Maryland must provide care without such threats.

Best,

The Coalition Against Policing By Hopkins  
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