



Testimony on HB 694
Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement
Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Jessica Klaitman, and I am a resident of Baltimore County. I am writing on behalf of Baltimore Women United, a diverse group that educates women on important issues, engages them as voters, constituents, candidates and donors, to further women's equality in Baltimore and throughout Maryland. I am also a social worker with over 20 years of experience. I am writing today in support of House Bill 694-the Medical Bill Reimbursement Act.

HB694: Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement will **rectify nonprofit hospitals' systemic overbilling of patients who should have received free healthcare by paying patients back and hold hospitals accountable to their legal obligation to provide free healthcare to low-income Marylanders.** A recent study by the Health Services Cost Review Commission found that in the years 2017-2018, Maryland's nonprofit hospitals charged patients who should have received free healthcare 60% of the time; totaling an estimated \$60 million per year that was wrongly taken from patients.

Hospitals have a fund of taxpayer money to draw upon for people in dire need who cannot afford medical care. By charging low-income patients despite the availability of these funds, hospitals have harmed the people they are meant to help. This bill repairs some of the harm done to our most vulnerable community members. It presents an exciting and rare opportunity to right wrongs, and concretely help people who have been hurt.

HB694 will establish a process requiring state agencies and the Comptroller to identify patients who were wrongly charged, and refund those patients the amount that they overpaid. The legislation protects patients' privacy in accord with HIPPA and establishes a process to safely reach out to patients who use an alternate address. HB694 covers patients who were wrongly charged between 2017-2021, and requires progress reports to this committee and the House Health & Government Operations Committee.

I respectfully urge this committee to fight for Maryland's low-income patients by **issuing a favorable report with NO weakening amendments on HB 694.**

Sincerely,

Jessica Klaitman

Baltimore Women United Steering Committee