

## Testimony of Michael DeLong to Senate Finance Committee on HB 694 Hospitals-Financial Assistance-Medical Bill Reimbursement-Favorable

Chair Kelley, members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Michael DeLong and I am a resident of Silver Spring, a local advocate and organizer, and a member of the Montgomery County Young Democrats. I strongly urge you to support HB 694, the Medical Bill Reimbursement Act.

HB 694 will correct nonprofit hospitals' systemic overbilling of patients who should have received free healthcare by paying patients back, and it will 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; in total, an estimated \$60 million per year was wrongly taken from patients.

Past wrongs need to be acknowledged and corrected. Health care is a human right, and in these cases many people who should have gotten free medical care had to pay substantial amounts of money. Many of them had to go into debt, which disproportionately harms low-income people and Black Americans. 27.9 % of Black households have medical debt, compared to 17.2% of white households nationwide. Providing these refunds will help people who badly need assistance and promote racial equality.

Moreover, the costs of gas, food, and housing are increasing and outstripping minimum wage increases. The patients who qualify for free care live paycheck to paycheck, and providing them with a refund for overpayment will increase their economic security. It is the right thing to do.

HB 694 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. HB 694 covers patients who were wrongly charged between 2017-2021, and the bill requires progress reports to this committee and the House Health & Government Operations Committee.

Please vote for HB 694, favorably report the bill out of the Finance committee, and urge your colleagues to support the bill. Contact me at [michaeldelong94@gmail.com](mailto:michaeldelong94@gmail.com) if you have any questions.