



Testimony on HB 694
Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement
Health and Government Operations Committee
Position: FAVORABLE
Kony Serrano, On Behalf of CASA

March 28, 2022

Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

CASA is pleased to provide support for HB694 Medical Bill Reimbursement. CASA is the largest membership-based immigrant services and advocacy organization in the mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 120,000 Black and brown immigrants and working families.

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.

Immigrant families have worked on the frontlines during the pandemic with 250K of them being excluded from healthcare programs due to their immigration status. Families often turn to the emergency rooms when facing life or death situations and leave with high bills that often put their families at risk of losing income for food and housing. This bill would be the first step to holding hospitals accountable for violating their commitment to offer financial assistance to patients whose income falls under a certain threshold.

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.

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