

Testimony from Michael DeLong Before House Health and Government Operations Committee in Support of HB 694-Hospitals-Financial Assistance-Medical Bill Reimbursement

Favorable
March 2, 2022

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

Thank you for receiving my testimony. My name is Michael DeLong and I am a resident of Silver Spring and very involved in state and local politics, where I serve as President of the Montgomery County Young Democrats and volunteer with Jews United for Justice. My testimony today is in a personal capacity. I strongly support HB 694—the Justice for Hospital Patients Act—which would require hospitals to pay back low-income patients who were unfairly charged when they should have received free medical care.

In February 2021, the Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission released a report which found that in 2017 and 2018 hospitals collected about \$60 million each year from patients who should have received free health care. This happened even though hospitals are required by state and federal law to provide free care to patients who meet certain requirements.

And these patients are just the tip of the iceberg—many other people were aggressively pursued by hospitals for debt collection. This \$60 million annual sum is just what free-care eligible patients paid toward their bills—meaning the total amount these patients were pursued for by hospitals, via debt collectors and lawsuits, is probably much higher. Hospitals are required by law to provide financial assistance to low-income patients, and they failed to do so—either through greed, negligence, or both.

HB 694 establishes a three step process to set things right: first, it identifies the patients who overpaid and were overcharged by the hospitals. The Comptroller's Office and Department of Human Services will work with the Health Services Cost Review Commission to identify the patients. Second, the patients will be notified; postcards will be sent to them letting them know they are eligible for reimbursements and telling them how to go about this process. Third, hospitals will have to reimburse these patients, which is only fair. And if enough patients file to get reimbursed through this process, hospitals will have to review their debt collection practices for 2019, 2020, and 2021, and fix them.

I was appalled when I learned that these patients were taken advantage of and had their money stolen by hospitals, the very institutions that are supposed to help people! This bill puts hard-earned cash in the hands of Marylanders who were robbed by the hospitals who were supposed to help them but instead exploited them.

As a proud resident of Legislative District 20, I am proud that my Delegate Lorig Charkoudian has sponsored this bill, and thank her for her advocacy. I urge the Committee to favorably report HB 694 with no weakening amendments.

Please contact me at michaeldelong94@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael DeLong". The script is cursive and fluid.

Michael DeLong
Silver Spring, MD 20901