



END MEDICAL DEBT MARYLAND

Testimony on HB 694

Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement

Position: **FAVORABLE**

To Chair Pendergrass and the House Health & Government Operations Committee:

My name is Katherine J. Jones, and I'm a resident of Frederick County, Maryland. I am a member of the End Medical Debt Maryland Coalition and Progressive Maryland, and I support House Bill 694.

HB 694 responds to the shocking report that Maryland hospitals collected an estimated \$60 million from patients who *should have received free medical care* in both 2017 and 2018. These numbers were uncovered by the Health Services Cost Review Commission in an analysis produced last year as a requirement of legislation passed by this very committee in 2020.

As a lawyer for a legal services program for over 30 years, all my clients' incomes were under the federal poverty income guidelines. I represented many people over the years sued by hospitals for debts. In every case, the lawyer for the hospital dismissed the case once I raised the issue that the client should have received free medical care under Maryland law. For every one of those clients, I know there were many more who did not know their rights or were not represented by a lawyer to avoid the debt. I also represented far too many clients who had to file bankruptcy because of enormous medical debt which may have been avoidable under Maryland law. Often, by the time these clients came to me to file bankruptcy, their retirement funds had been depleted from trying to pay such debts, and they had incurred more debt because they didn't have those funds for food, rent and medication. I do not blame my clients for not knowing their rights. Hospitals do not get that pass. They have attorneys representing them when they create the policies that result in these lawsuits. They know better. There is no excuse for hospitals to have gained these profits. That money must be returned.

This bill puts hard-earned cash back in the hands of low-income Marylanders who were robbed by the hospitals that were supposed to care for them. HB 694 gives hospitals the chance to start making things right.

I respectfully urge this committee to demonstrate its commitment to Maryland patients by **issuing a favorable report with NO weakening amendments on HB 694.**

Sincerely,

Katherine J. Jones
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