



Policy Foundation of Maryland

Committee: Judicial Proceedings, Finance

Testimony on: SB0404 - Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement Process

SPONSOR: **Senator Hershey, Senator Hayes**

Organization: Policy Foundation of Maryland, EMD Maryland (End Medical Debt MD)

Person Submitting: **Sarahia Benn (Executive Dir.) PFOM**

Position: **Favorable**

Hearing Date: February 23, 2023 1PM

Mrs. Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing testimony today in support of HB0404. Policy Foundation of Maryland is a statewide grassroots organization focused on State and County level legislation and policies that impacts Black, Brown, Marginalized, low income communities and Veterans affairs. Medical and healthcare legislation is of massive importance to these communities particularly due to how impacted these communities have been historically and currently particularly in for multiply residents in rural areas.

My name is Sarahia Benn. I'm a resident of Harford County and Executive Director of Policy Foundation of Maryland. I am a member of the End Medical Debt Maryland coalition. I support SB0404 which will implement a process to reimburse hospital patients who were supposed to receive free healthcare but were wrongfully billed by a hospital.

I entered into political advocacy because of how abusive the medical and health care system was to my elderly parents and many others like them; one parent a Korean Veteran and the other ex government worker. I have continued to find more and more regarding our failed medical and health care system to be outraged about. This is why learning that around \$60 million per year has been stolen from low-income Marylanders who are already struggling to get by and are stressed from quality of life issues is just unacceptable in 2023.

This bill is important to my P.F.O.M. because we represent those who are unheard, unseen, and underrepresented, particularly considering that I reside in a multiply marginalized predominant district that experiences all these issues and has the largest low income, Black, marginalized, and Veteran community in Harford County who all suffer from medical debt issues.

According to the law, hospitals are legally obligated to offer financial assistance to patients whose income falls under a certain threshold. By not doing so these hospitals are violating their commitment to serve their communities and stealing from members of our communities who are the most vulnerable and do not have throwaway funds.



Background

Last year, the legislature passed HB694 in response to a 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 committee in 2020.

HB694 required the Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC) to convene a workgroup of all stakeholders to figure out the best process for refunding patients while also maintaining patient privacy and ensuring safe-addresses were used for survivors of intimate partner violence. The workgroup met throughout the fall and there was a consensus among all parties that patients should be refunded.

SB0404

SB0404 is a technical bill that implements the best process to refund patients. The bill simply provides support to assist affected consumers through the Office of the Attorney General and requires a report on progress to the General Assembly. This is important for accountability purposes.

SB0404 ultimately puts hard-earned cash back in the hands of low-income Marylanders who were robbed by Maryland hospitals that were supposed to care for them not only from a health standpoint, but the entire process of the stay which includes the financial end. This bill gives hospitals the opportunity to start making things right.

For these reasons, I urge an **FAVORABLE REPORT** on **SB0404**.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarahia Benn
(Policy Foundation of Maryland, EMD Maryland)

(Dedicated to Black History month)

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane.”

— [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)