



January 23, 2024

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association
Support SB 217 Health Insurance - Conformity With Federal Law

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association extends its support for Senate Bill 217 Health Insurance - Conformity With Federal Law.

By conforming with the No Surprises Act, Maryland will continue to help patient and families in Maryland. The No Surprises Act of 2020 marked a major step forward in protecting patients from medical debt by curbing surprise medical billing, a practice in our health care system that imposed unnecessary, excessive costs on patients. The law passed with bipartisan support and represented the strongest protections for patients since the Affordable Care Act.

Prior to the implementation of the NSA, it was estimated that 1 in 5 emergency claims and 1 in 6 in-network hospitalizations included unexpected medical charges from out-of-network providers.¹ Cardiovascular patients were particularly susceptible to these bills because of the unexpected and urgent nature of the event and the care. Cardiovascular patients rely on emergency transportation, including air ambulances, to ensure they receive the care they need as fast as possible. Without the NSA, patients were routinely billed as much as \$30,000 per air ambulance ride, an unaffordable cost especially when patients don't have a choice over how they're transported in emergency situations.²

Surprise medical bills ultimately drove up premiums for millions of people by adding more than \$40 billion in additional spending each year for those with employer-sponsored insurance.^{3 4} Surprise medical bills can also cause patients to take on significant medical debt, joining the estimated 100 million people in the United States in debt due to medical and dental bills.⁵ Medical debt can be overwhelming, causing patients and their families to make impossible decisions to balance paying for basic household needs while managing debt and continuing

¹ *Surprise Medical Bills: New Protections for Consumers Take Effect in 2022*. KFF, 4 Feb. 2021, www.kff.org/private-insurance/fact-sheet/surprise-medical-bills-new-protections-for-consumers-take-effect-in-2022/.

² *Air Ambulance: Available Data Show Privately-Insured Patients Are at Financial Risk*. Government Accountability Office, March 2019. [khttps://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-292.pdf](https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-292.pdf)

³ *In Pursuit of Profit, Private Equity Expanded into Health Care. The Results Raise Concerns about Cost and Quality*. Arnold Ventures, 7 Sept. 2020, www.arnoldventures.org/stories/part-1-in-pursuit-of-profit-private-equity-expanded-into-health-care-the-results-raise-concerns-about-cost-and-quality.

⁴ Cooper, Zack, et al. *Out-Of-Network Billing And Negotiated Payments For Hospital-Based Physicians*. Health Affairs, 16 Dec. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00507>.

⁵ Levey, Noam N. *100 Million People in America Are Saddled with Health Care Debt*. KFF Health News, 16 June 2022, www.kffhealthnews.org/news/article/diagnosis-debt-investigation-100-million-americans-hidden-medical-debt/.

health care. It can also affect a patient's ability to obtain medical care.⁶ The NSA has protected patients across the country from most surprise medical bills and their consequences. In the first nine months of 2022, the law prevented an estimated 9 million surprise bills.⁷

The No Surprises Act is an important law that protects patients from the harmful practice of surprise medical billing. When patients are faced with a medical emergency, their only focus should be on the immediate care they need – not the network status of their specialist or the laboratory running medically necessary tests.

The American Heart Association urges a Favorable Report on SB217.

⁶ Lopes, Lunna, et al. *Health Care Debt In The U.S.: The Broad Consequences Of Medical And Dental Bills*. KFF, 16 June 2022, www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-care-debt-survey-main-findings/.

⁷ *No Surprises Act Prevents More than 9 Million Surprise Bills Since January 2022*. AHIP and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, November 2022. <https://www.ahip.org/resources/no-surprises-act-prevents-more-than-9-million-surprise-bills-since-january-2022>