



Testimony on SB981

Hospitals - Financial Assistance and Collection of Debts - Policies

Position: **FAV**

To Chair Beidle and Senate Finance Committee Members:

My name is Brige Dumais, and I am the Political Coordinator with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, with 10,000 members in Maryland and Washington, DC. 1199SEIU urges a **favorable** report on SB981 to expand access to financial assistance to patients living paycheck to paycheck, increase transparency and consistency in hospital financial assistance, and prohibit medical debt lawsuits for patients owing \$500 or less.

Medical debt is a major problem for Maryland residents, especially those from low-income households and among communities of color. An average hospital stay costs \$14,200. Maryland hospitals often sue their former patients to collect medical debts below \$5,000. A study¹ found that many of the patients sued by hospitals were their own workers – including workers represented by 1199SEIU.

1199SEIU is always concerned about the delivery of quality health care to patients as well as the debt its own hard-working people may incur in receiving health care. SB981 will advance those goals by setting standard subsidy levels for patients who are eligible for reduced cost care, ensuring all patients receive affordable care wherever they may be hospitalized; prohibiting reporting of hospital debt to credit agencies; and barring hospitals from suing patients who owe less than \$500. We support SB981 and urge a favorable report.

In Unity,
Brige Dumais, Political Coordinator
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¹ https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/sites/default/files/nnu/documents/0220_JHH_PreyingOnPatients_Report-opt.pdf