

Memorandum In Support of SB 981 – Senator Hershey

Senate Finance Committee

February 18, 2025

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network is the nonprofit nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society. ACS CAN empowers cancer patients, survivors, their families and other experts on the disease, amplifying their voices and public policy matters that are relevant to the cancer community at all levels of government. We support evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. On behalf of our constituents, many of whom have been personally affected by cancer, we stand in strong support of SB 981.

Medical debt impacts many people with cancer, their caregivers and their families. ACS CAN has long fought for public policies – like access to comprehensive and affordable health insurance coverage – that reduce the likelihood or severity of that debt. Unfortunately, many Americans remain uninsured or underinsured and even those with comprehensive coverage can still incur significant medical debt.^{1,2} People with cancer often bear significant health care costs because they can have substantial health care needs, are high utilizers of health care services, use many different providers, and sometimes require more expensive treatments. They also must pay many indirect costs, like transportation and lodging as well as losing wages due to unpaid time off or job loss, that add to their already heavy cost burden.

In March & April of 2024, ACS CAN asked people with cancer and survivors about their experiences with medical debt through a [Survivor Views survey](#). The survey found that nearly half of the cancer survivors surveyed carried medical debt related to their cancer treatment:¹

49% of those with debt owed over \$5,000
35% have carried their debt for more than three years
55% have gone to collections
49% say their cancer debt has hurt their credit score

SB 981 builds on medical debt protection legislation enacted in 2021 (Chapter 770) by tightening protections for patients by, among many things:

- standardizing financial assistance levels for patients who are eligible for reduced cost care, ensuring all patients can afford care regardless of the hospital where they are receiving it;
- prohibiting reporting of hospital debt and other adverse information related to hospital debt to credit agencies;
- prohibiting hospitals from suing patients when they owe \$500 or less.

This legislation will move us closer to our goal of preventing Maryland residents with cancer, survivors, caregivers and their families from incurring and suffering from medical debt as a result of necessary cancer treatment. ACS CAN thanks the Chair and committee for the opportunity to testify and urges a favorable report of SB 981.

¹Banegas MP, Guy GP, de Moor JS, et al. For Working-Age Cancer Survivors, Medical Debt And Bankruptcy Create Financial Hardships. Health Aff (Millwood). 2016;35(1):54-61. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0830

²Death or Debt? National Estimates of Financial Toxicity in Persons with Newly-Diagnosed Cancer - The American Journal of Medicine. Accessed April 9, 2021. [https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343\(18\)30509-6/fulltext](https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343(18)30509-6/fulltext)