



Bill Title: HB268 Hospitals - Financial Assistance and Collection of Debts - Policies

Position: SUPPORT (FAV)

To: The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk, Chair Health & Government Operations Committee

From: Erica Puentes, Legislative Coordinator, on behalf of Progressive Maryland

Dear Honorable Madam Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

Progressive Maryland is a statewide non-profit grassroots advocacy group that works for a more just, equitable, and patient centered healthcare system. We know from our work in communities across the state that too many Maryland families are saddled with medical debt, tens of thousands of them with hospital debt.

While our state has made some progress shoring up the rights of hospital patients and addressing the need to reimburse hospital patients who were eligible for reduced cost or free care but didn't receive it, more needs to be done to prevent medical debt in the first place.

Progressive Maryland strongly supports HB268, a hospital debt prevention bill that will deliver benefits to everyday Marylanders. We ask that you hold a favorable vote in Committee and that you urge your House colleagues to support HB268 in the full House. Marylanders will applaud your efforts to support them and to hold hospitals more accountable.

The bill is valuable, in particular, because it will create minimum standard levels of subsidy for patients eligible for reduced cost care. It should not matter which hospital a Marylander uses; we should be assured that we can afford care no matter which hospital in Maryland we use.

In addition to setting minimum standards, the measure will rein in some of our hospitals' harmful practices. For example, the practice of reporting hospital debt and other adverse information related to hospital debt to credit agencies, which undermines patients' ability to secure housing and other services, will be prohibited. And as things currently stand, hospitals are able to sue patients who are already burdened by uncertainty about their health and finances. HB268 takes a good step to address this situation by prohibiting hospitals from suing patients who owe less than \$500. For this reason, **Progressive Maryland urges a favorable report on HB268.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Erica Puentes, Legislative Coordinator
Progressive Maryland