

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 565
Health Facilities –Hospitals –Medical Debt Protection**

To: Chairman Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Gino Renne, President, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, International Vice President, UFCW

Dear Chairman Pendergrass and members of the Health & Government Operations Committee

On behalf of the members of UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, I urge you to support the Medical Debt Protection Act (HB565/SB514). Local 1994 represents over 8,000 public employees and private employees in local government, including many public health professionals. Our members serve vulnerable and needy populations throughout Maryland.

The truth is 20 percent of Americans have at least one medical debt collection item in their credit reports and at least half of the items in collection in credit reports are due to medical debts. Even some of our represented members have experienced crippling medical debt.

But we know that no one plans to get hurt or to get sick and no one should be scared to seek health care because of their ability to afford care.

HB565/SB514 would protect low and middle-income households from punitive medical debt lawsuits. It will prohibit medical debt lawsuits for \$1000 or less, require income-based repayment plans, and prevent wage garnishments and liens on homes over medical debt.

COVID 19 has laid bare the inadequacies of consumer protections on medical debt. An investigative report in August 2020 showed that when some of the hardest hit states were dealing with the fallout of the pandemic, private hospitals were choosing again to sue their patients for unpaid debt. Unemployment and underemployment impair repayment efforts. The ability to pay medical debt is trumped by the need to cover rent, utilities, and groceries.

UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO urges the Committee to issue a **favorable** report on the Medical Debt Protection Act. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gino Renne
President, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, International Vice President, UFCW