



Testimony on HB 694
Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement
Position: **FAVORABLE**

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Maryland/DC. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the United States, representing over 10,000 members who work in hospitals and Long-Term Care facilities across our region. 1199SEIU is also a founding coalition member of End Medical Debt Maryland. Our union supports HB 694 and recommends the Committee issue a **favorable** report.

HB 694 responds to a report by the Health Services Cost Review Commission that was released during the 2021 legislative session, which used a statistical analysis to uncover that Maryland hospitals collected approximately \$60 million per year from patients who should have received free medical care in 2017 and 2018. 1199SEIU finds the report's findings to be *outrageous*. It is unconscionable that non-profit hospitals -- who receive millions of dollars a year from the State to provide free healthcare to those who otherwise couldn't afford it -- are taking money out of the pockets of Maryland's poorest residents.

Healthcare workers know that the biggest barrier to receiving health care is whether or not that care is affordable for the patient. Far too many Maryland patients delay seeking health care because they know they can't afford it and cannot risk going into medical debt. 1199 members have long warned about the consequences of delaying preventative health care. Not receiving preventative care or addressing minor health care issues causes patients health to deteriorate long term, and the more severe a patient's condition is, the higher their medical bill ultimately will be. Patients should be able to focus on healing, not worrying about medical bills they can't afford.

When passed, HB 694 will put hard-earned cash back in the hands of low-income Marylanders who were robbed by the very hospitals that were supposed to care for them. 1199SEIU respectfully urges this committee to demonstrate its commitment to Maryland patients by issuing a **favorable report with NO weakening amendments** on HB 694.

Sincerely,
Ricarra Jones
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