

Testimony on HB 694
Hospitals - Financial Assistance - Medical Bill Reimbursement

Position: **FAVORABLE**

To Chair Pendergrass and the House Health & Government Operations Committee:

My name is Bessie Liu, and I'm a resident of Baltimore City and a medical student at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. I am a member of the End Medical Debt Maryland Coalition, and I strongly support House Bill 694.

HB 694 responds to the shocking report that Maryland hospitals collected an estimated \$60 million from patients who *should have received free medical care* in both 2017 and 2018. These numbers were uncovered by the Health Services Cost Review Commission in an analysis produced last year as a requirement of legislation passed by this very committee in 2020.

As someone who has experienced health issues requiring major surgery and long-term follow-up, I consider myself extremely lucky to have been in the position to receive good care. But I want to emphasize that interactions with the healthcare system nowadays are dependent upon patients having financial security, health insurance, and many other resources we all may take for granted. As a medical student hoping to one day practice primary care in low-income and minority communities, I find it appalling that patients from vulnerable communities are preyed upon in this manner. How are physicians supposed to "do no harm" to patients, when every hospital or emergency room visit or medically necessary surgery is shadowed by the threat of bankruptcy, and when necessary financial assistance is being withheld from those who are rightfully meant to receive it?

It is disconcerting to think that the original mission statement for Hopkins Hospital specifically stated Hopkins' commitment to providing care for marginalized communities – but with its long history of taking advantage of marginalized communities, especially communities of color, Hopkins has now strayed far from those origins. I am certain the same is true for many other hospitals in Maryland.

If one is able-bodied, well-educated, stably employed, and reasonably well-off, it can be difficult to comprehend what it's like for Maryland individuals and families who are *not* privileged in this way. But it is important to try – to listen to those who have been systematically silenced and oppressed, and then to fight on their behalf. This bill puts hard-earned cash back in the hands of low-income Marylanders who were robbed by the hospitals that were supposed to care for them. HB 694 gives hospitals the chance to start making things right in the face of all these injustices.

I respectfully urge this committee to demonstrate its commitment to Maryland patients by **issuing a favorable report with NO weakening amendments on HB 694.**

Sincerely,

Bessie Liu
Maryland Legislative District 46