



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

To Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee,

My name is Shantelle Zeigler. I'm a Geriatric Nursing Assistant, Certified Nursing Assistant, and a Patient Care Technician at a Long-Term Care facility in Baltimore and a member of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. I support HB694 to give medical bill reimbursements to hospital patients who were supposed to receive free health care. Please vote **yes** on this legislation.

As a healthcare worker, every day I work hard to care for my patients, especially during COVID19. I let my patients know I am there for them and I provide them with assistance on things they cannot do themselves. Even though my coworkers and I are making so many sacrifices working through the pandemic and the short staffing crisis in Long-Term Care, our employer provided health insurance is minimal. That means that many of my coworkers and I are being forced to make an impossible choice to either go into medical debt to receive the healthcare we need, or don't receive healthcare and have our health conditions get worse. No one should ever have to choose between their health and their ability to afford basic necessities without going into medical debt.

I have diabetes, but my insurance does not cover the cost of my medication, and I can't afford to pay for it out of pocket. Because of this, I have not been able to take my

diabetes medication in four months. Leaving my illness untreated is making my health worse, and will end up costing me more money later. I've been on the phone with my insurance company over 10 times pleading with them to cover my medication, but they don't care. I'm not able to focus on my health when I have to spend what little free time I have arguing with the insurance company.

I was outraged when I learned that non-profit hospitals in Maryland are legally required to provide free health care to low-income patients but are charging those patients anyway. Hospitals are supposed to tell patients they qualify for free or reduced cost care, not make the patient figure that out on their own, especially after they were already billed. I know how draining it was for me to have to spend so much time on the phone with my insurance company, so I can easily imagine hospital patients trying to figure out if they can get free healthcare while they are trying to heal is also a burden.

This legislation to make hospitals pay back patients will create more accountability from hospitals because if hospitals are required to pay patients back, they will be more incentivized to fix their systemic overbilling of free care patients. I urge the committee to issue a **favorable** report on HB694 with **no weakening amendments**.

Sincerely,

Shantelle Zeigler
1199SEIU, Member
Baltimore City Resident