

NEWS

... from the Illinois House of Representatives

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FOR MORE INFORMATION
State Rep. Karen May
Springfield - (217) 782-0902
Highland Park- (847) 831-5858

May Legislation to Protect Patients from Aggressive Billing Passes House

SPRINGFIELD – Patients in Illinois saddled by medical debt will receive much needed relief thanks to legislation sponsored by state Rep. Karen May, D-Highland Park, that unanimously passed the House on Friday, March 3, preventing hospitals and collection agencies from employing unfair or overly-aggressive billing practices.

“The cost of medical treatment in Illinois and throughout the country is growing so fast that, quite frankly, falling ill is getting too expensive for families,” said May. “This legislation will help working families throughout the state pay their medical bills without having to exhaust their savings, ruin their credit and declare bankruptcy.”

House Bill 4999, the Fair Patient Billing Act, was passed by May as an initiative of Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan. The legislation establishes standards and responsible practices that all licensed hospitals in Illinois, as well as the collection agencies they employ, must follow when seeking payment from patients. Some of the provisions in May’s legislation include posting information and making available brochures on financial assistance for patients, providing patients with contact information where they may inquire about their bill and payments and mandating that hospitals must return all patients inquiries about bills in a timely fashion. The bill also includes protections for non-insured and insured patients alike when hospitals turn their cases over to collection agencies.

In 2001, approximately two million people across the country, including over 110,000 families in Illinois filed for bankruptcy due to outstanding medical bills. As these numbers continue to grow, many hospitals have begun to utilize collection practices, including garnishment of wages, which can leave working families devastated. Collection practices are the second largest consumer complaint to the Attorney General’s office. May’s legislation would allow hospitals to continue to receive the payments they are owed, using practices that will be less harmful to families.

“It’s important that people know hospitals are still allowed to make a profit, in fact this legislation is supported by the Illinois Hospital Association,” said May. “This legislation is fair for patients but not unfair to hospitals. Patients who have become ill and are already in an unfortunate situation need all the help we can give them in getting back on their feet. Making sure they can responsibly pay their bills without being hounded by hospitals and creditors will help them enormously.”

House Bill 4999 now moves to the Senate for further consideration.

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