



To: House Committee on Judiciary
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition
Date: March 5, 2024
Re: **SUPPORT H7103** – To protect patients with medical debt

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a goal to protect, improve, and expand equitable access to quality, person-centered, affordable health care for all. The Coalition strongly **supports House Bill 7103**, which will protect Rhode Islanders with medical debt.

The [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau reports](#) that, on average, Rhode Islanders carry \$1,300 in medical debt, a median of \$513.

The [Commonwealth Fund](#) estimates that 5.1% of Rhode Islanders with medical debt are in collections. People of color [are 68% more likely to have medical debt](#) in collections.

As noted by the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), despite high rates of health coverage in our population, “medical debt remains a persistent problem due to high deductibles and cost-sharing. For people and families with [limited assets](#), even a relatively small unexpected medical expense can be unaffordable. For people with significant medical needs, medical debt may build up over time.”

Patients with medical debt often choose to delay or avoid care when they need it. And as Kaiser notes, “people with medical debt [report](#) cutting spending on food, clothing, and other household items, spending down their savings to pay for medical bills, borrowing money from friends or family members, or taking on additional debts.”

House Bill 7103 will eliminate harmful medical debt collection practices, including prohibiting liens on people's homes, wage garnishment, and the reporting of medical debt to credit bureaus, and would cap interest on medical debt at 3%. These protections will ease some of the burden and financial toxicity patients with medical debt in Rhode Island experience, especially for more critically ill Rhode Islanders.

Healthcare is not a commodity. No person should be driven to bankruptcy, have to forgo life-saving care to eat or to keep a roof over their head, or be forced to beg for dollars with a GoFundMe if they become sick. We urge your support. Thank you.

Protect Our Healthcare Coalition allies & partners: Economic Progress Institute, Mental Health Association RI, RI NOW, RI Parent Information Network, RI Health Center Association, United Way of Rhode Island, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, Foster Forward, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, Oasis Wellness & Recovery Center, RI Community Food Bank, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, The Womxn Project, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), Thundermist Health Center, National Association of Social Workers RI Chapter, Advocates for Better Care

c/o the Economic Progress Institute, 600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Building #9, Providence, RI 02908
via email at: protectrihealth@gmail.com