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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2023

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Oregon House Votes to Protect Patients from Medical Debt

House Bill 3320 makes sure non-profit hospitals are following the law and providing free or discounted medical care to patients who qualify

SALEM, Ore. - This week, the Oregon House took steps to protect Oregon patients from incurring medical debt. [House Bill 3320](#) makes sure non-profit hospitals, who are tax-exempt, follow the law and offer free or discounted medical care to low-income patients who qualify. Their tax exempt status obligates them to offer what is known as “charity care.”

The New York Times [reported](#) last year that the Providence hospital system had trained staff to hound low-income patients for bill payments that should have been covered through financial assistance.

“This lack of compliance from hospitals has immediate and often devastating consequences for patients who should automatically receive financial assistance,” **said [Representative Lisa Reynolds \(D-Washington County\)](#), chief sponsor of the bill and pediatrician.** “House Bill 3320 makes sure hospitals are holding up their end of the deal and that patients are receiving the financial assistance they are eligible for when they seek medical care.”

House Bill 3320 achieves the following:

- **Required Screenings for Eligibility:** Non-profit hospitals would be required to screen patients who have bills of \$500 or more to see if they are eligible for financial assistance.
- **Financial Assistance Applied from the Start:** For eligible patients, the amount of financial assistance would be applied before the patient receives a bill.
- **Full Refunds for Eligible Patients Who Already Paid:** Patients found eligible who have already paid, will receive a full refund.

- **Accessible, Easy Financial Assistance:** The legislation would also require that financial assistance applications and appeals processes are easily accessible online.

In 2019, the legislature passed House Bill 3076, which required Oregon's non-profit hospitals to provide financial assistance to those, both insured and uninsured, who could not afford to pay their medical bills. Only one of Oregon's 60 hospitals, OHSU, has provided full, fair, and consistent charity care since the bill was passed.

House Bill 3320 clarifies how this should be done through a more transparent process. The legislation is supported by OHSU, Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, Providence, SEIU and more.

House Bill 3320 passed 54-4 and now heads to the Senate for consideration.

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