



WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR HB 49

Ilaria Santangelo
Director of Research

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Representatives. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about House Bill 49. My name is Ilaria Santangelo, and I am the Director of Research at PatientRightsAdvocate.org, a non-profit, non-partisan organization seeking real prices and a functional marketplace in healthcare.

My team published the recent Hospital Price Transparency Compliance Report, which found that only 22 percent of Ohio hospitals were fully complying with *every* regulation in the federal price transparency rule, in effect now over two years.

Today I want to talk to you all about the importance of your critical legislation, codifying healthcare price transparency with actual prices, and why estimates don't work. But first, I want to talk about the CMS blogpost that surveyed higher compliance.

We can't draw comparisons from their *blogpost* to our *fully comprehensive report* because in their blogpost they state, which I quote, 'the results cannot be used to determine compliance with respect to *every* regulatory requirement, which often necessitates a more detailed analysis and direct interaction with the hospital, as occurs during a comprehensive compliance review.' What good is a compliance review if it is not comprehensive or complete?

I also think this is important; estimates are not real prices. They provide no accountability and often end up hundreds or thousands of dollars more than quoted. Patients even have to check a box assuring that they agree their estimate won't be the final price.

Below are stories from patients who did their research, planned their care, trusted the estimates they were given for care that they needed, only to be stuck with bills they did not see coming or afford.

A man went into the hospital for routine tests. He received an estimate of \$1,800 only to be charged over \$7,500.

After getting \$5,500 estimate for an ovary removal, this elementary school teacher and mother of two gets a bill for over \$60,000.

Another man received an estimate for \$8,500 for an outpatient surgery and but received bills totaling over \$25,108.

And finally, a \$0 estimate turned out to be a \$2,300 bill.

This is the reality of the price estimator tools hospitals have been touting and these examples only represent a fraction of the patients that write into us sick and scared because they thought they were doing the right thing.

And not to mention, the machine-readable files are the only resource that will provide remedy and recourse when a surprise bill comes in the mail. We can't dispute an estimate with an estimate. We can only dispute an estimate with a real price. And when we help patients fight their over charged estimates with the actual prices provided in the machine-readable files, hospitals end up wiping the bills and blame a "glitch" in their system.

This is why Ohio needs to take the lead on enforcing this law to help all Ohioans better afford and shop for their healthcare. Every bill is a surprise bill when you don't know the actual price upfront.

Fully compliant price transparency would unleash competition, level out price variations, and lower healthcare costs for all patients, employers, unions and workers. To achieve fully compliant transparency, Ohio must enforce it. We need to be on the side of all Ohioans who are scared to seek care due to fear of financial ruin, not the side of the hospitals putting these patients into unnecessary medical debt. We need to make shopping for healthcare easier for Ohioans, not billing for healthcare easier for hospitals.

A vote for House Bill 49 is a vote to promote real and accountable price transparency that will allow patients to take care of their physical health, while protecting their financial wealth. Thank you.