

House Bill 257 Proponent

Policy Matters Ohio, Kathryn Poe

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, and Ranking Member Somani, my name is Kathryn Poe, and I am the Budget and Health Policy Researcher at Policy Matters Ohio. I am excited to testify today in support of the Ohio Medical Debt Fairness Act and would like to start by thanking Representative Schmidt for sponsoring the legislation.

House Bill 257, the Ohio Medical Debt Fairness Act, puts simple, common-sense guardrails in place to protect patients and consumers across the state. This bill would do three key things: Cap interest rates for medical debt at 3%, ban medical debt from impacting your credit scores, and ban wage garnishment for unpaid medical bills.

H.B. 257 is a bipartisan bill modeled after the National Consumer Law Center language, and like others passed in states like Virginia and New Hampshire. Medical Debt is a substantial, widespread problem – one KFF study from 2024 showed that 20 million people (nearly 1 in 12 adults) owed medical debt in 2021. Most of the 20 million adults with medical debt owe over \$1,000, and about half (11 million people) owe over \$2,000.

Many people with complex health needs that require ongoing care can see medical bills pile up over time. I am one of those people. In 2018, when I was 20, I received a lifesaving bone marrow transplant for MAS/HLH - a rare, life-threatening blood disease that I was diagnosed with when I was 16. In the years prior, I'd spent much of my young adult life living in and out of pediatric hospital centers around Ohio, like Akron and Nationwide Children's Hospital. My bone marrow transplant saved my life, but it was also a million dollars. In the years leading up to my transplant, I received bills as high as \$200,000 dollars for a single hospital stay, and my treatment included medications that were as high as \$60,000 dollars for a single transfusion.

Both of my parents are hardworking Ohioans – my father is a veteran who was born in Appalachia, and my mother is a mental health counselor in Northeast Ohio. And yet, there was no way for us to keep up. Much of my care was paid through charity care coverage through Nationwide Children's Hospital, but I am still paying other bills to this day. As a young person,

looking forward to my financial future, the reality that my medical debt could follow me into the future was overwhelming.

No one should ever have to worry about their financial future because of a treatment that saved their life. Ohioans all over the state shouldn't have their credit score and financial futures ruined because of events they cannot control. Whether it's a work accident or a long-term condition, this legislation will protect the financial future of Ohioans for many years to come.