



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 6, 2024**

HB 5320, An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5320, An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance**. CHA opposes this bill.

Connecticut hospitals are critical to their communities. They are confronting the challenges posed by a post-pandemic healthcare system with an exemplary healthcare workforce that continues to provide outstanding care. But challenges remain. Hospitals are treating sicker patients, it continues to be challenging to hire and retain staff, and the financial headwinds are grave. Through it all, hospitals are steadfast, providing high-quality 24-hour care for everyone who walks through their doors, focusing on making Connecticut's healthcare system more equitable, and driving world-class innovation right here in Connecticut.

Connecticut hospitals strive to ensure that the inability to pay for services does not deter anyone from seeking needed medical care. It is why they work hard to ensure that their financial assistance policies are applied to all those who are eligible and to connect eligible, uninsured patients with a regular source of health insurance coverage.

CHA's primary objection to this bill is that it is largely duplicative. Section 1 of this bill focuses on financial assistance for individuals enrolled in (1) the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or (2) the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), regardless of immigration status. All Connecticut hospitals already provide free care or financial assistance to individuals who fall within the income requirements of these programs, regardless of immigration status.

Section 1 also requires that hospitals use a uniform application for financial assistance. In addition to offering free care for low-income individuals, hospitals may offer a range of financial assistance programs to help patients cover their medical expenses. These programs vary from hospital to hospital and typically have specific requirements regarding who qualifies and criteria for eligibility. The programs available and the requirements may vary from year to year. An application that took into consideration all such requirements would be difficult to maintain (because programs change), and it would require the patient to complete a much longer and more burdensome form than they would otherwise need to complete if they were

using an application specific to an individual hospital and its programs. Finally, this bill imposes unnecessary and burdensome reporting requirements that add to hospitals' administrative expenses and, ultimately, the cost of care, while also authorizing the Attorney General to investigate the application of hospital financial assistance policies. Hospitals already provide the Office of Health Strategy (OHS) with information related to charity care and reduced cost services and oversight of these submissions by OHS is an appropriate level of review.

CHA will continue to focus on hospitals' efforts to make their financial assistance programs as easy to access and navigate as possible, raise awareness about these programs with patients, and ensure that hospital staff remain well-prepared and trained to articulate these policies to patients.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.