



SEIUHealthcare.
United for Quality Care

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Testimony in Support of H-5975 – Appropriating \$1,000,000 for Medical Debt Relief

Chair Abney and Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of SEIU 1199 New England, representing over 5,000 healthcare and service workers across Rhode Island, we write in strong support of **H-5975**, a joint resolution to appropriate \$1,000,000 for the continued purchase, cancellation, and forgiveness of medical debt.

Medical debt remains a crushing burden for far too many Rhode Islanders—including many of our own members. SEIU 1199NE recently organized workers at several nursing homes owned by an out-of-state, for-profit chain that was not paying employee health insurance premiums. As a result, we have members—many of whom work full time providing care to vulnerable residents—who now carry **tens of thousands of dollars in medical debt** through no fault of their own. This relief program could change their lives.

Since launching last fall, the **Rhode Island Medical Debt Relief Program** has already delivered extraordinary results. As of March 2025, the program has erased **\$7 million in medical debt for approximately 3,000 Rhode Islanders**. And it has done so by leveraging public dollars for maximum impact: of the \$1 million appropriated in the FY25 budget, only about \$50,000 has been used so far to purchase debt, with massive returns.

This is a **tremendous return on investment**—one that not only reduces individual financial distress but also prevents homelessness, food insecurity, and mental health struggles often linked to unpaid medical bills. In Rhode Island, where an estimated **5.2% of residents struggle with medical debt**, continuing to fund this program is one of the most compassionate and fiscally responsible choices the state can make.

We urge the committee to pass H-5975 and continue Rhode Island's leadership in tackling the medical debt crisis.

Respectfully,

Alex Moore

Political Director, SEIU 1199NE