March 16, 2023

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins Honorable Carl Heastie

Senate Majority Leader Speaker of the Assembly

907 Legislative Office Building 932 Legislative Office Building

Albany, NY 12247 Albany, NY 12248

Dear Majority-Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie:

Thank you for your past leadership in protecting patients from medical debt, including stopping providers from placing liens on patients’ homes or garnishing their wages. We are a group of organizations who have come together in a campaign to End Medical Debt in New York State. Our organizations represent consumers, older people, labor, immigrants, people of color, religious organizations, disability rights groups and other patient organizations. We have joined together to elevate the concerns of patients who face crushing medical debt in our state.

We urge you to continue this leadership by including the Ounce of Prevention Act (S1366 (2023)|A8441A (2022)) to modernize the Hospital Financial Assistance Law in the State budget.

While we are proud that our state invests deeply in its health care industry, New Yorkers are still drowning in medical debt and subjected to aggressive collection activities, including thousands of collection lawsuits annually. This is an unacceptable consequence for seeking health care, which we all agree is a basic human right. Moreover, medical debt disproportionately hurts people of color, who are more likely to be uninsured and thus more dependent on safety nets like hospital financial assistance.

The Ounce of Prevention Act would obviate the need for aggressive hospital collection actions and lawsuits by reforming our state’s antiquated and flouted Hospital Financial Assistance Law. Research shows the most aggressive hospitals fail to offer meaningful financial assistance to their patients, while drawing down millions from the State Indigent Care Pool.

The Governor’s Budget offers an important opening to real reform by calling for a common hospital financial aid application. But we ask you to do more by including these provisions in the final budget deal: increased income eligibility levels; better discounts; longer application time frames; eliminating the asset test on poor people only. All of these components are included in the Ounce of Prevention bill, which passed both Health Committees last year.

We are counting on you to continue the fight to #EndMedicalDebt in New York. Thank you!