

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Berneta Haynes, Georgia Watch
404-525-1085, bhaynes@georgiawatch.org
Laura Colbert, Georgians for a Healthy Future
404-890-5804, Lcolbert@healthyfuturega.org

Georgia Legislature Passes Legislation to End Surprise Medical Bills

ATLANTA (June 17, 2020) | Today, the Georgia Senate unanimously approved House Bill 888, bringing Georgia one step away from ending burdensome surprise medical bills. In February, Senator Chuck Hufstetler (R – Rome) and Representative Lee Hawkins (R – Gainesville) introduced identical legislation aimed at eliminating balance or surprise billing for many health care services. Senate Bill 359 and House Bill 888, both known as the Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act, aim to take patients out of the middle of billing disputes between providers and insurers. Before the session suspended, the bills received overwhelming support, both passing their respective chambers. With the passage of HB 888 in the Senate today, the Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act now heads to Governor Kemp’s desk for his signature. The Governor has demonstrated his strong support of legislation to reduce surprise medical billing, even mentioning it as a priority in his 2020 State of the State Address in January.

Representative Richard Smith (R-Columbus), who serves as House Rules Committee Chairman, and Senator Hufstetler worked diligently in recent years to advance legislation to address surprise medical bills and successfully fought to move the Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act through the legislature. Georgia Watch and Georgians for a Healthy Future also advocated for the Act, which they say will go a long way toward increasing transparency, making health care more affordable, and taking patients out of the disputes between insurance companies and health care providers, a matter of increasing importance amid the current coronavirus pandemic.

“After years of steadfast advocacy to protect consumers from surprise medical bills, we are grateful that Georgians will soon be taken out of the middle of these billing disputes. This is a huge victory for patients and will bring urgent relief to Georgians struggling under the weight of medical bills during the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis. We thank Chairman Smith, Senator Hufsetler and Representative Hawkins for fighting for Georgians,” said Berneta Haynes of Georgia Watch, a consumer advocacy organization that has persistently advocated for legislation to reduce surprise billing.



“For years, Georgians have been unfairly expected to pay out-of-pocket when they unknowingly see a doctor who is not covered by their insurance plan. The passage of the Surprise Medical Bill Consumer Protection Act restores some fairness and balance to the health care system by removing the financial penalty for something that consumers often have no control over,” said Laura Colbert of the consumer health advocacy group Georgians for a Healthy Future. “Georgia families will now have the peace of mind that they won’t be buried under unexpected medical bills after an emergency or a planned procedure at an in-network facility. We are grateful for the leadership of Gov. Kemp, Senator Hufstetler, Chairman Smith, and Representative Hawkins on this important issue.”

The Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act disallows surprise billing in emergency situations and when a patient receives scheduled services at an in-network facility. The legislation further requires patients to give consent before receiving out-of-network services but only after they are provided with an estimate of the cost of such services. The Act also enables insurers and providers to settle any payment disputes through a resolution process. The Act covers an array of health care services and providers, including hospital or ambulatory care facilities. The Act applies to fully-insured individual and small-group insurance plans regulated by Georgia’s Department of Insurance and the State Health Benefit Plan; these plans cover an estimated 2.5 million Georgians, according to an estimate by Georgians for a Healthy Future. Once signed into law, the Act will take effect starting January 1, 2021.

#