



March 29, 2004

Tom Beck, Chairman
Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board
Illinois Department of Public Health
525 W. Jefferson St., Second Floor
Springfield, IL 62761

Dear Chairman Beck,

Everyone who lives and works in Illinois should have access to quality health care we can afford. And we need to know we can depend on our hospitals. Hospitals are a critical part of our community's health care, and they play a vital role in our economy.

Unfortunately, our hospitals are letting us down. Some Illinois hospitals are charging the most to people who can afford it least. Not only are uninsured patients forced to pay the highest rates for hospital care, but they are subject to aggressive collections practices that include garnishing their wages, placing liens on their homes and driving them into bankruptcy.

In recent months, policymakers at all levels of government are shining a light on these practices. Two U.S. Congressional committees have launched inquiries into hospital price discrimination and aggressive collections and the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services recently reprimanded hospitals for using Federal regulations to justify these practices. Elected officials in Illinois are taking action as well.

- Chaired by Obama
- • The Illinois Senate Health and Human Services Committee opened an inquiry into aggressive hospital pricing and collection policies, paying particular attention to the business practices of Advocate Health Care.
 - The Illinois Attorney General launched a statewide investigation and subpoenaed records from several major hospital chains.
 - The Illinois Department of Revenue revoked the tax exemption of a Champaign/Urbana hospital because the hospital filed lawsuits against patients struggling to pay their bills.

As hospital business practices push health care out of the financial reach of many consumers, it will take all sectors of government working together to secure affordable health care for low-income residents.

I urge the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board (IHFPB) to examine hospital pricing and debt collection policies, as well as the provision of charity care, as you determine whether or not to award permits for new hospital construction in our state. I believe a broader examination of these issues is consistent with the IHFPB's goal to protect the financial ability of consumers to access health care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barack Obama', written in a cursive style.

Senator Barack Obama