



MARYLANDERS FOR PATIENT RIGHTS

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Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights Goes into Effect for all Marylanders

New Law will provide consumer protection for Maryland hospital patients

A landmark Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights that swept through the Maryland General Assembly in a unanimous vote last spring will go into effect October 1. The new law guarantees that all hospital patients—whether admitted, in ER or outpatient—will receive a list of their 24 legal rights. These rights will provide additional protection for hospital patients, who are some of the most vulnerable consumers.

After languishing in the Maryland General Assembly for several years with stiff opposition from the Maryland Hospital Association, the high profile patient dumping event and self-dealing scandals that rocked UMMS helped to galvanize bill supporters and legislators alike to take action.

Delegate Karen Lewis Young of Frederick was the lead sponsor of the bill in the Maryland House of Delegates. "The Maryland General Assembly provided a clear mandate for the Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights by a unanimous vote, and the bill was signed into law by Governor Hogan," said Delegate Lewis Young. "We have overwhelming bipartisan support for this important new law which protects vulnerable hospital patients and promotes engagement of patients in their own health care."

The law was supported by Marylanders for Patient Rights, a coalition of 25 advocacy groups which includes AARP, NAACP, mental health and disability rights activists, and patient safety advocates. "The Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights affects nearly every person in our state," said Anna Palmisano, founder of the coalition. "Who has not had a family member, a friend, or themselves been hospitalized?"

"It's just and fair to enact the Hospital Patient's Bill Rights," said Tammy Bresnahan, Director of Advocacy for AARP MD. "All patients and their caregivers should expect to be treated with dignity, respect, and kindness, and to understand their rights when in any Maryland hospital."

The Maryland State Conference NAACP was also a major supporter of the bill. President Gerald Stansbury stated: "The enactment of this law will help to reduce the implicit biases that often exist in

the way in which healthcare is delivered in Maryland medical facilities. The Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights is designed to keep medical facilities accountable for providing a better understanding of patient rights within the healthcare system."

The 2019 Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights replaces an outdated 1978 law that failed to adequately protect patients and was sometimes ignored by hospitals. The new law provides comprehensive protection by improving communication between patients and medical staff, and requiring training of medical staff on patient rights.

"As someone with a significant disability who has spent six weeks in an ICU, I personally know how vital the Hospital Patient's Bill of Rights is for patients," said Edward Willard, Jr., an Annapolis-based advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. "People with disabilities have unique needs, and medical professionals have an obligation to those patients when they are in their care."

Concerns remain, however, about the law's implementation by the hospitals, after four years of resistance by the Maryland Hospital Association. "Patients will need to ensure they get a copy of their rights when they enter a hospital and that those rights are honored," said Palmisano. "Forward-looking hospitals such as Frederick Memorial Hospital are already well-prepared for implementation, and we look forward to productive discussions with other hospitals."

"Patients have waited long enough to have their rights enforced," said Kashay Webb, Co-Vice President of the American Association of University Women - Maryland. "The Maryland Department of Health should act in good faith and carefully enforce this law to protect all patients."

The Marylanders for Patient Rights Coalition includes 25 advocacy groups: AARP MD, Alzheimer's Association of MD, AAUW, American Council of the Blind-MD, The Arc Maryland, CASA, Citizens for Patient Safety, Compassion and Choices, Consumer Health First, Disability Rights MD, Maryland Alliance for the Poor, Maryland Coalition of Families, Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, Maryland Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Advisory Council, Maryland Retired School Personnel Association, Mental Health Association of Maryland, NAACP –MSC, NARAL Pro-Choice MD, National Association of Social Workers – MD, Patient Safety America, Support for Families of Nursing Home Residents, Surgical Fire, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of MD, and United Seniors of Maryland.