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**HOUSE COMMITTEE APPROVES MADIGAN'S BILLS TO IMPROVE HOSPITALS IN ILLINOIS**

Springfield -- The House Health Care Availability and Access Committee last night approved two critical pieces of legislation that, if passed into law, would significantly improve the way hospitals do business in Illinois.

These laws will benefit financially needy patients and consumers harassed by overly aggressive hospital billing and debt collection practices and assist hospitals by providing clear guidelines for them to follow concerning charity care and billing and collection practices.

The first bill, the Tax-Exempt Hospital Responsibility Act, will ensure that hospitals taking advantage of very lucrative tax-exemptions earn that privilege by investing at least eight percent of total operating costs in care for poor patients.

The companion legislation, the Hospital Fair Billing and Collection Practices Act, will require all tax-exempt and for-profit Illinois hospitals to avoid unfairly aggressive and harassing tactics when seeking payment from patients.

“My legislative reform effort follows years of investigation, the comprehensive study of a task force of experts and the extensive experience of my office’s Health Care Bureau. My effort is intended to set a clear standard for tax-exempt hospitals to follow and, consequently, to improve the provision of care for the poor and uninsured,” Madigan said. “The legislation is specifically refined to consider the mission and the work of tax-exempt hospitals and to allow them to preserve their tax-exempt status to build on their current efforts to provide care to those who need it.”

Madigan added, “I will continue meeting with hospitals, legislators and community groups to craft this legislation to improve health care in Illinois. We know that tax-exempt hospitals provide invaluable services. That’s not the issue. The issue is what they give in return for their special status.”

State Rep. George Scully is the lead sponsor of the Tax-Exempt Hospital Responsibility Act. State Rep. Karen May is the lead sponsor of the Fair Hospital Billing and Collection Practices Act. The bills also are supported by State Rep. Mary Flowers, who is the chair of the House Health Care Availability and Access Committee.

“My bill is critical in helping uninsured, low-income residents of Illinois,” Scully said. “It clearly implements the provisions in our state Constitution and will benefit the consumers and hospitals alike.”

“We are working with hospitals and consumers to ensure that HB 4999 provides fair and clear billing and collection guidelines,” May said.

“Despite what the IHA says, these bills are win-win for the hospitals and patients, especially the working poor and uninsured, by helping hospitals determine the level of charity care they must provide and by putting new, more reasonable billing and collection practices into place,” Flowers said.

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