

Financial Relief for Civilians Treated at Military Hospitals Act

Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Joaquin Castro

Background: Department of Defense (DoD) Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) commonly treat civilians when the civilian needs emergency medical care or when the MTF has a unique ability to treat the patient. Providing this care saves lives, but it also keeps our military strong. DoD enhances its medical readiness and benefits from treating civilian emergency patients. Providing care to civilians provides training opportunities for medical personnel as they treat more complex and diverse cases. It also enables teams to train together during emergency care, builds relationships with nearby communities, and helps MTFs to be designated as trauma centers if they are treating a high volume of or complex civilian cases.

Yet civilians transported to MTFs for emergency care – often with no control over where they are taken – face burdensome healthcare costs and debt when they are uninsured, the MTF is not covered under their insurance, or they have high co-pays or deductibles. Once saddled with unanticipated medical bills, civilians treated at MTFs face aggressive debt collection practices from DoD.

This is particularly concerning for already vulnerable populations who are uninsured and low-income. A July 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that 67% of civilian emergency patients who received emergency treatment at MTFs during Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 through FY 2021 did not have insurance. The report also found that DoD was not consistently communicating medical debt relief options to civilians and was not accurately updating billing systems to reflect received payments from civilians. Federal law already allows the DoD, Treasury, and the Department of Justice to settle debts for less than the full amount owed, but they almost never exercise this authority. GAO found that only 0.1 percent of the 26,696 civilian medical debt cases they reviewed were reduced.

The *Financial Relief for Civilians Treated at Military Hospitals Act* will ensure that MTFs continue to enhance military readiness without racking up huge bills for civilians receiving emergency medical care. Specifically, the legislation would do the following:

Eliminates Prior Civilian Bills for Treatment at MTFs

- Eliminates previous bills for medical services incurred by civilians treated at military medical treatment facilities who are not covered under TRICARE.

Prohibits Charges for Emergency Medical Treatment of Civilians

- Prohibits a military medical treatment facility from charging a civilian or their private insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid for any emergency medical treatment.