



April 22, 2019

The Honorable Dr. Jim Wood, Chair  
Assembly Health Committee  
State Capitol, Room 6005  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 1611 (Chiu) – Emergency hospital services: costs. SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Wood,

Writers Guild of America West supports AB 1611 (Chiu), which would protect patients from surprise emergency room bills and unfair debt collections from out-of-network hospitals. This bill would ensure that patients only owe out-of-network hospitals the same copay or deductible they would pay for in-network emergency care. We respectfully request your “AYE” vote on this measure.

AB 1611 would protect patients by making sure they only owe their in-network cost sharing to the treating hospital for emergency care, regardless of whether the emergency room is in- or out-of-network for their insurer. While California has some existing protections against balance billing, these protections do not currently apply to federally-regulated plans such as Writers Guild of America West’s health plan, or the other such plans that cover millions of California residents. This legislation would close loopholes in the existing California law by applying protections against surprise medical bills and balance billing to all Californians in the case of emergency room visits, regardless of the regulator of their health plan.

This legislation would also prevent patient bills from being sent to debt collection agencies for amounts in excess of their copays or deductibles. Lastly, AB 1611 would help control healthcare costs by setting the out of-network hospital rate to the greater of 150% of Medicare rate or the average contracted rate paid by the specific health insurer for the same or similar services in the same geographic area.

California should use all of the tools at its disposal to protect patients. No consumer, especially one that is insured, should be at risk of surprise medical bills just because they went to an emergency room. **For these reasons, Writers Guild of America West supports AB 1611 (Chiu) and respectfully requests your “AYE” vote.**

Sincerely,

Corri Freedman  
Political and Legislative Director

CC: Assemblymember Chiu  
Members, Assembly Health Committee