

## **Heather Riemer, AFT Vermont, Testimony in Support of S.31 on 2/14/2019**

My name is Heather Riemer, I'm the Director of AFT Vermont and live in Burlington.

AFT Vermont represents 5000 healthcare and higher education professionals in Vermont.

[handout AFT Vermont platform: [http://vt.aft.org/sites/default/files/article\\_pdf\\_files/2019-01/aftvtlegislativeplatform2019-20.pdf](http://vt.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2019-01/aftvtlegislativeplatform2019-20.pdf) ]

This platform was developed through a process of surveying and engaging our members on the key legislative items that our union is supporting this biennium, and was ratified by our members at our convention.

The number one healthcare issue for our members is to fulfill the mandate of Act 48, Universal, publicly financed healthcare. And arguably, if we had Act 48, we would not need S.31.

S.31 is a common sense bill that will make the cost of healthcare more transparent.

When our national union has done surveys, surprise billing is one of the biggest dissatisfactions of the current healthcare regime. This is when someone goes to an in-network hospital but is seen by an out-of-network provider. This happens most often in Emergency Departments when patients don't have a lot of choices, and is just wrong.

When we surveyed our members at UVM Medical Center this last fall, the respondents reported that

\* 61% said someone in their household had trouble paying their medical bills in the past two years (and nationally, medical debt remains the number one cause of bankruptcy).

\* 33% said they were contacted by a debt collector--some for an amount as small as \$15.

A personal story: years ago, when our children were young, we had to pay our full deductible for a series of tests. We couldn't afford the full amount and so set up a monthly payment with the hospital. Despite making our monthly payments on time every month, the hospital turned our bill over to a collections agency.

To conclude, the members of our union, AFT Vermont, believe that until we achieve publicly funded, universal healthcare, we need the transparency in medical billing and collections that S.31 provides.

Thank you