

April 24, 2025

Senator Kyle Mullica, Chair
Senator Dafna Michaelson Jenet, Vice Chair
Colorado Senate Health and Human Services Committee

RE: Small Business Majority's support for HB25-1088: Costs for Ground Ambulance Services

Thank you, Chairman Mullica and members of the Committee:

My name is Hunter Nelson and I'm the Colorado Director for Small Business Majority, a small business organization with a mission to empower America's diverse entrepreneurs to build a thriving and equitable economy. I'm pleased to provide written testimony on House Bill 25-1088, legislation that would establish reimbursement rates for ambulance services that are out of network.

Access to affordable, quality healthcare is crucial to small businesses' ability to compete with large corporations for talented employees, in addition to ensuring entrepreneurs and their employees get the care they need. Health coverage is most small businesses' largest expense outside of payroll. That's why it's worrisome that our [research](#) found that small businesses are struggling with rising healthcare costs, with 24% of small businesses that once offered health insurance to employees saying they had to drop coverage altogether.

Too many Colorado small business owners and employees receive large surprise bills after being taken to a hospital by an ambulance. This happens when a consumer unknowingly is seen by an out-of-network provider for a service, and the consumer is billed for charges that their health plan or insurer will not pay. In the case of ambulances, the consumer has no choice whether the ambulance that arrives is contracted with their insurer or health plan, resulting in many surprise bills. Even if the consumer had the ability to choose an in-network ambulance, the immediate nature of a medical emergency would make it too dangerous to wait.

For ambulance rides, Colorado patients often [receive a surprise bill](#) of over \$1,000, and sometimes more than \$2,000 depending on the provider and insurer. This can be financially destabilizing, especially for low- and moderate-income Coloradans who lack significant savings. As a result, some small businesses owners and their employees may not call 911 for fear of the ambulance bill, delaying needed care.

Therefore, we support this legislation that would prohibit an out-of-network ambulance from billing an individual with a health insurance plan the outstanding balance for a covered service that was not paid for by their insurance carrier except for any coinsurance, deductible or copayment amount required to be paid by the individual.

By passing HB25-1088, we would protect Coloradans from surprise bills that could have a devastating impact on their finances. The fear of these exorbitant bills could even cause some to avoid seeking much needed care, therefore leading to negative medical consequences. We urge you to pass this legislation so that Colorado's entrepreneurs and workers can affordably access the emergency services they need.

Sincerely,

Hunter Nelson
Colorado Director
Small Business Majority

Ambulance Billing Protections Should Apply to Everyone

My family was left with a substantial and unexpected “out-of-network” ambulance bill in the wake of an emergency. Our legislators have the opportunity to fix that billing loophole with House Bill 25-1088, which expands protections against surprise ambulance billing to include services provided by public entities in Colorado.

On January 11, 2024, my husband, Michael, collapsed while refereeing a high school basketball game at Lewis Palmer High School in Monument. Thanks to the quick action of an athletic trainer and a physician attending the game, emergency services were called. The Monument Tri-Lakes Fire Department ambulance arrived promptly, administered a drug to stabilize his heart rhythm, and transported him to UC Health North in Colorado Springs.

After several tests, Michael was diagnosed with supraventricular tachycardia. He eventually underwent a successful ablation procedure and, thankfully, has made a full recovery. We are grateful for the care he received that night and in the weeks that followed.

However, a few months later, we were shocked to receive a bill for over \$900 for the ambulance ride. Our insurance had already paid over \$1,000, and we had met our deductible but because the ambulance provider was considered “out-of-network,” we were left to pay the balance ourselves.

I was surprised to learn that Colorado law currently protects patients from surprise ambulance bills only if the service is provided by a *private* ground ambulance company. Those same protections do *not* apply when the responding agency is a public one, such as a local fire department. A patient in crisis has no control over which ambulance shows up. Expecting people to vet ambulance providers in the middle of a medical emergency is unreasonable and unjust.

After countless calls to both the ambulance billing department and our insurance company, we were left with no choice but to pay the bill. This experience made it painfully clear that Colorado needs to extend billing protections to all patients, regardless of whether a public or private ambulance responds.

HB25-1088 would close this gap and ensure that public ambulance providers follow the same billing standards as private ones. No family in the middle of a health emergency should have to worry about being financially blindsided simply because the responding agency is publicly funded.

HB25-1088 is the right thing to do for Colorado families.

Karen Flaherty
Colorado Springs, CO

Good afternoon, members of the committee on Health & Human Services. I am a Denver resident and public health student here today to speak in strong support of HB25-1088. This effort is a critical step toward protecting Colorado families from the overwhelming financial burden of unexpected ambulance bills, a burden I've experienced firsthand.

A few years ago, my daughter had a seizure. We called 911 and paramedics arrived quickly. They determined she needed immediate transport to the hospital. In that terrifying moment, my only focus was her health, not insurance, out-of-network status, or cost calculations.

We later received multiple bills, significantly higher than anticipated, and were left struggling to understand what our insurance covered, what was considered out-of-network, and why we were responsible for such a large sum. There were few resources available online, and no published rates to reference.

According to the US Public Interest Research Group, 51% of ambulance rides result in a so-called surprise bill, averaging almost \$500. How many Coloradans may face these bills and decided to avoid an ambulance in the future?

HB25-1088 directly addresses the confusing problems my family, and so many others, have faced after an emergency ambulance ride. It supports all Coloradans by removing the threat of medical debt from emergencies through two key provisions:

Establishing out-of-network reimbursement rates

- This is the most impactful provision for many families. Our bill was initially classified as out of network. Only after an appeal was I able to reduce costs, but I've worked in healthcare – how would the average citizen be able to navigate this process?

Prohibiting balance billing for out-of-network services

- We were initially billed for the outstanding balance beyond what our insurance paid, despite it being an emergency - an incredibly frustrating experience. This bill protects covered individuals from being held responsible for those excess charges, limiting their out-of-pocket costs to their standard copays, deductibles, and coinsurance.

I've worked as an EMT. I understand the stress of the job, the thin margins, and the relatively low wages that these lifesaving healthcare providers face. However, this bill will shift responsibility for payment into a regulated insurance market and generate

more consistent and reliable reimbursement structure. I believe these providers will adapt and thrive alongside the community.

I strongly urge you to support this bill. It will provide much-needed protection and transparency for Colorado families, ensuring that access to life-saving emergency medical transportation doesn't come at an unpredictable and potentially devastating financial cost. By passing HB25-1088, you will be directly improving the lives of your constituents and providing peace of mind during the most vulnerable moments in their lives. Thank you for your time and consideration.

To: Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee
From: Khoa Nguyen | Young Invincibles | MD/MBA Candidate at the University of Colorado
Re: **HB25-1088: Costs for Ground Ambulance Services**

Mr. Chair, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony with you. My name is Khoa Nguyen. I am representing Young Invincibles as one of their Young Advocates. I am completing my MD at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and my MBA at the University of Colorado Denver Business School. Short of applying to residency and obtaining my MD, I have fulfilled all curricular and licensure requirements expected thus far for the MD. I am here to encourage you all to **pass HB25-1088**.

During the last semester of my senior year of high school, I came down with a back-to-back case of viral bronchitis and bacterial bronchitis. It was a miserable two months of my life. Nights were constantly plagued with bouts of coughing, phlegm, and sputum. However, there was one night it was particularly at its worst. I could not sleep that evening despite the amount of NyQuil I had taken. All of a sudden, I struggled to breathe. My parents were incredibly concerned and called for an ambulance. This experience was the first time that I rode an ambulance to the hospital as a patient.

A month later, a bill was sent to my parents' home. The ambulance was considered out-of-network, according to my insurance. They had billed my family approximately \$1,000.00 for the ambulance service they had called for their son. I am sure many of you and your constituents are aware that procuring \$1,000.00 to cover healthcare bills is not easy. Imagine being financially indebted for having to call a necessary emergency service for your child.

According to an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association, a cross-sectional study of over 2 million ground ambulance services revealed a prevalence of out-of-network billing of 54.8% [1]. Similarly, the FAIR Health Access study found that in 2022, out-of-network transportation accounted for 59.4% of all ground ambulance claims [2]. It is essential that we address the high costs necessary for ground ambulance services.

I am particularly encouraged by HB25-1088's provisions on:

1. Improving transparency of established ambulance service rates by requiring all political subdivisions or their contracted ambulance services to annually submit rates to the Division of Insurance (DOI),
2. Require insurance carriers to reimburse out-of-network ambulance services at the submitted rates,
3. Prohibiting out-of-network ambulance services from billing patients for any outstanding balance beyond the patient's coinsurance, deductible, or copayment.

No one should be forced to sacrifice financial stability and security for necessary emergency services. I urge every committee member to **vote "yes" on HB25-1088**. Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

To: Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee

From: Khoa Nguyen | Young Invincibles | MD/MBA Candidate at the University of Colorado

Re: HB25-1088: Costs for Ground Ambulance Services

Khoa Nguyen | MD/MBA Candidate

University of Colorado School of Medicine | University of Colorado Denver Business School

Youth Advocate | Young Invincibles

Junior Fellow | Global Council on Science and the Environment

References

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2. <https://www.fairhealth.org/article/nearly-60-percent-of-ground-ambulance-rides-were-out-of-network-in-2022-according-to-new-fair-health-study#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20out%2Dof%2Dnetwork%20transport%20accounted%20for%2059.4.made%20up%2040.6%20percent%20of%20the%20distribution.&text=Out%2Dof%2Dnetwork%20rides%20made%20up%2063.7%20percent%20of,in%202018%20and%2059.4%20percent%20in%202022.>