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## **Hancock Files Landmark, Bipartisan Legislation Preventing Surprise Medical Bills**

*SB 1264 removes patients from provider v. health plan emergent care negotiations, creates mediation opt-in for federally-regulated insurance policies*

**AUSTIN** - Sen. Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) today filed legislation to prevent surprise medical billing of consumers in Texas. SB 1264 and its companion by Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer (D-San Antonio), would allow medical providers and facilities to directly trigger an existing Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) balance bill mediation program for payment negotiations with health insurance companies, while prohibiting them from sending surprise balance bills to consumers.

"Thousands of Texans receive unexpected, and frankly unreasonable, surprise medical bills every year," said Sen. Hancock, Chairman of the Senate's Business and Commerce Committee. "Mediation works when it's available and has saved Texas patients more than \$30 million in out-of-pocket health care expenses. But they're still getting stuck in the middle of payment negotiations, with no choice over care or control over costs. It's time to change that."

Hancock first established the TDI surprise bill mediation program in 2009 after the issue was brought to his attention by a constituent. HB 2256 (81R) created a process for patients to dispute surprise charges greater than \$1,000 from certain out-of-network providers working at in-network facilities. He later passed SB 481 (84R) and SB 507 (85R) to expand the program's availability and coverage.

Currently, mediation protections address surprise balance bills greater than \$500 from all emergency providers, including freestanding emergency departments, and all out-of-network providers working at a network facility. Under state law, these types of balance bills are required to include a consumer disclosure statement with instructions for contacting TDI's mediation help line. Nevertheless, many patients simply don't know if, when, or how to request state assistance with a medical billing dispute.

"Texans are fed up with surprise medical bills, and consumers deserve to be held harmless from the anguish and shock that they encounter due to billing disputes between insurers and medical providers," said Bob Jackson, state director of AARP Texas. "The landmark legislation sponsored by Senator Kelly Hancock and Representative Trey Martinez Fischer to end surprise medical billing is great news for patients throughout Texas."

Also included in SB 1264 is a provision to allow federally-regulated, self-funded health benefit plans to opt into the strong state protections afforded under the bill. These plans make up at least 40% of the Texas health insurance market.

To read the full text of the legislation or follow its progress, visit Texas Legislature Online at <https://capitol.texas.gov/>.

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*Sen. Hancock represents [District 9](#), which includes portions of Dallas and Tarrant Counties. He currently serves as Chairman of the Texas Senate Committee on Business & Commerce and Vice Chair of the Texas Senate Committee on Transportation.*