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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

JOINT RESOLUTION

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$1,000,000 FOR THE PURCHASE, CANCELLATION
AND FORGIVENESS OF MEDICAL DEBT

Introduced By: Senators McKenney, Burke, Appollonio, and Euer

Date Introduced: March 07, 2025

Referred To: Senate Finance

(General Treasurer)

1 WHEREAS, Today, far too many Rhode Islanders remain saddled with medical debt; and

2 WHEREAS, Unpaid medical bills pose a major impediment to financial security, and can
3 carry significant legal and psychological burdens that can follow our friends, our families, and
4 our neighbors for years; and

5 WHEREAS, Through no fault of their own, an estimated five and two-tenths percent
6 (5.2%) of Rhode Islanders struggle under the weight of medical debt; and

7 WHEREAS, Unlike most other types of debt, medical debt is usually unexpected and can
8 catch people without a financial plan; and

9 WHEREAS, According to a report published by the Consumer Finance Protection
10 Bureau, “[t]wo-thirds of medical debts are the result of a one-time or short-term medical expense
11 arising from an acute medical need”; and

12 WHEREAS, The same report found veterans, older adults, those with disabilities, and
13 minority populations are disproportionately impacted by medical debt relative to national
14 averages; and

15 WHEREAS, Due to increasing patient cost-sharing, medical debt is common even among
16 households with health insurance; and

17 WHEREAS, A report published by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that sixty-three
18 percent (63%) of households with medical debt report reducing expenses on food and clothing,
19 and forty-eight percent (48%) report using up all or most of their savings because of medical

1 debt; and

2 WHEREAS, The same holds true in Rhode Island; and

3 WHEREAS, The General Assembly created the Rhode Island Medical Relief Program
4 under § 35-4-21.1 for the purchase, cancellation and forgiveness of medical debt; and

5 WHEREAS, Medical debt can be purchased for pennies on the dollar; and

6 WHEREAS, Continued funding of the Medical Debt Relief Program will help end
7 medical debt in Rhode Island; now, therefore be it

8 RESOLVED, That there is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the treasury not
9 otherwise appropriated for the fiscal year 2025-2026, the sum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000)
10 for the continued purchase, cancellation and forgiveness of medical debt consistent with § 35-4-
11 21.1 and the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to draw their orders upon the
12 general treasurer for the payment of said sum, or so much thereof as may be from time to time
13 required, upon receipt of properly authenticated vouchers.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
JOINT RESOLUTION
MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$1,000,000 FOR THE PURCHASE, CANCELLATION
AND FORGIVENESS OF MEDICAL DEBT

- 1
- This resolution would authorize the appropriation of the sum of \$1,000,000 for the
- 2
- continued purchase, cancellation and forgiveness of medical debt consistent with § 35-4-21.1.

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