

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The logo for Healthcare Rising Arizona is a purple square with the text "HEALTHCARE RISING ARIZONA" in white. "HEALTHCARE" is in a smaller font at the top, "RISING" is in a larger, bold font in the middle, and "ARIZONA" is in a smaller font at the bottom, flanked by two horizontal lines.

New Grassroots Advocacy Group – *Healthcare Rising Arizona* – Files 2020 Ballot Initiative to Improve Health and Hospital Care in our State

PHOENIX — Healthcare Rising Arizona, a new statewide, grassroots healthcare advocacy organization, announced at a news conference today that it has filed language to put an initiative on the 2020 ballot that would improve Arizonans’ health and hospital care.

The new organization, composed of patients, consumers and healthcare workers, submitted the measure covering four issues:

- **Surprise billing:** Protects Arizonans against surprise medical bills from out of network providers and requires refunds if patients are overcharged;
- **Infection control:** Requires private hospitals to meet national safety standards regarding hospital-acquired infections and gives the state Department of Health Services the authority to impose civil penalties if hospitals fail to meet those standards;
- **Fair Pay:** Gives direct care hospital workers a five-percent wage increase each year for four years (this includes nurses, aides, technicians, janitorial and housekeeping staff, social workers, and nonmanagerial administrative staff); and
- **Pre-existing conditions:** Bans discrimination based on pre-existing conditions so people in Arizona can count on getting affordable healthcare coverage.

“This package of improvements will fix a number of major problems in our state’s healthcare system to ensure that everyone can get the affordable coverage and safe care they need,” said Jenny David, a registered nurse and chair of the ballot committee set up to run the initiative – Arizonans Fed Up with Failing Healthcare. “These are sensible, important changes that we need to protect ourselves and ensure quality care.”

“The practices of our health care system are economically irresponsible and very

dangerous for patients,” said Steve Wasson, whose family has experienced surprise billing in Arizona and whose wife suffers from a pre-existing condition.

Surprise bills cost Arizonans millions of dollars of year and do severe financial harm to families – even putting some into bankruptcy. They are an especially big problem in emergencies, when a patient may be unconscious or in severe pain and the last thing on their mind is getting into a discussion about in- network and out-of-network treatment. Ambulance rides are another major source of surprise billing with people getting unexpected bills for hundreds or thousands of dollars. The initiative will eliminate surprise bills.

Hospital-acquired infections kill 99,000 people a year in the United States at a cost of \$20 billion. Arizona hospitals scored worse than national benchmark for incidences of the life-threatening bacterial infection known as C. Diff. The initiative is designed to reduce deaths and lower costs, allowing hospitals to focus on improving patient care.

Arizona has some of the highest turnover rates for hospital workers in the country, with many skilled, professional caregivers leaving for jobs in other states or leaving the profession each year because their salaries are so low. Hospital worker shortages have real consequences for patients, such as emergency room overcrowding, reduced hospital beds, and longer wait times for surgery. Paying people better will improve care.

The ban on discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions will close loopholes in the state law and protect Arizonans from efforts in Congress and the courts to overturn the Affordable Care Act, which would wipe out protections for people with pre-existing conditions.

You can learn more at: <https://www.healthcarerisingaz.org>

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