

16 Cromac Place
Cromac Wood
Ormeau Road
Belfast BT7 2JB

T (028) 90276976

E jmaghie@bma.org.uk

BMA

Northern Ireland

Keith McBride

The Committee Clerk
Committee for Health
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast, BT4 3XX

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Hospital Parking Charges Bill – call for evidence

Dear Committee,

The British Medical Association (BMA) is an apolitical independent trade union and professional association representing doctors and medical students from all branches of medicine across the UK. Our mission is we look after doctors so they can look after you.

BMA Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence on the Hospital Parking Charges Bill. Additionally, we would like to thank Fra McCann MLA and Aisling Reilly MLA for their work in bringing the bill to this stage.

The BMA has longstanding policy in favour of the aims of this bill for doctors, medical students, and patients. These can be found [here](#).

We support the removal of parking charges in health and social care trusts for a number of reasons, which we outline below.

Recognition of staff

We have repeatedly warned of the low levels of morale currently experienced by medical staff within the HSC, particularly but not solely due to the pressure of working through the coronavirus pandemic.

The removal of parking charges by the Minister of Health at the beginning of the pandemic was a move warmly welcomed by doctors. Their reintroduction in October came as doctors, and other HSC staff, look towards what we believe will be the most difficult winter for the HSC. The removal of these charges on a permanent basis would be a morale booster for staff at this very difficult time. We continually warn of issues of recruitment and retention relating to medical staff and this is one small step that could assist towards staff feeling more valued.

National director (Northern Ireland): Claire Armstrong

Chief executive officer: Tom Grinyer

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Junior doctors and medical students

As the committee will be aware junior doctors and medical students rotate across HSC sites throughout their training and studies. This often means they are unable to claim a regular parking space or pass during a placement/rotation. We hear frequently of junior doctors and medical students arriving early to shifts to ensure they can access a space which they then have to pay heavily for. Juniors doctors on our Northern Ireland Junior Doctors Committee (NIJDC) report costs of up to £600 per year to park at the Royal Victoria Hospital, if they can access a pass. Parking for a single shift at Belfast City Hospital can be £11 per day. Doctors who work across multiple sites are particularly disadvantaged by current car parking charges. The removal of car parking charges for all would also remove these inequities.

Car parking charges are just one aspect of the issue of car parking faced by doctors and medical students on shift in hospitals. Often the parking provided for HSC staff is far from the site itself and often poorly lit or poorly supervised. We have had many reports from members of feeling unsafe returning to cars in the dark after a night shift. Or, of returning to cars which have been vandalised. Steps to address these issues are additional moves the department and/or trusts could take to increase the morale of doctors.

Whilst we welcome the bill and support its aims, we do recognise that implementation will result in additional work for HSC trusts. Car parks will need to be regularly monitored to ensure free parking is not abused by people who are not accessing HSC services.

Whilst outside the scope of this Bill we would like the committee to encourage the department to work alongside the department for infrastructure on the development of greater connectivity between public transport routes and HSC sites. This would be helpful for patients and HSC staff and have the added bonus of being good for the environment too. The introduction of the glider route in Belfast past two hospitals is good example of this connectivity.

We would again like to thank the committee for the opportunity to comment on this private member's bill. Should you have any questions relating to this submission please contact Jenna Maghie, senior policy executive, in the first instance via jmaghie@bma.org.uk.

Yours sincerely



Dr Tom Black
Chair, NIC