



Press contacts:

- St. Mary's: Mark Ralston, mralston@stmarysathens.org
- RIP Medical Debt: Deniel.Lempert@RIPMedicalDebt.org

St. Mary's, RIP Medical Debt partner to abolish \$14M of debt

Collaboration demonstrates how hospitals and non-profits can provide community benefit, with 12,000 people receiving abolishment letters

Athens, Ga. – March 17, 2023 – St. Mary's Health Care System and RIP Medical Debt (RIP), a national non-profit, have reached an agreement that will result in the erasure of \$14.03 million worth of non-Medicare/Medicaid medical debt belonging to 12,000 individuals previously served by St. Mary's.

RIP Medical Debt is a nonprofit that acquires medical debts belonging to people who are financially burdened and then abolishes those debts. RIP then notifies recipients in writing of the financial and emotional relief provided by the abolishment of their medical debt.

Medical debt relief cannot be requested and is source-based, meaning RIP can abolish debts only for past-due accounts belonging to providers like St. Mary's that are willing to engage with RIP. RIP has two criteria for relief: individual or family income cannot be more than four times the federal poverty level, and/or the individual's medical debt must be 5 percent or more of that person's gross annual income.

In 2022, the federal poverty guideline was \$13,590 a year for an individual plus \$4,720 for each additional family member.

"Working directly with providers like St. Mary's is an amazing win-win-win scenario," said RIP Medical Debt President and CEO Allison Sesso. "Our valued hospital partner is compensated for some of the care it provided (without having to sell accounts to a debt collector), patients are relieved of the financial and emotional burden of debt they can't pay, and communities are uplifted as a result."

"Our Mission and Core Values call on us to care for the whole person – body, mind and spirit," said St. Mary's Interim President and CEO David Spivey. "High levels of medical debt challenge our past patients on all three levels. Partnering with RIP Medical Debt allows us to relieve those patients of their medical debt to St. Mary's while recovering a portion of that debt to help us continue providing the care our patients and communities need in a responsible and sustainable manner."

Abolishment details:

- RIP purchased 18,437 past due accounts from St. Mary's. The accounts belonged to 12,000 individuals and totaled \$14.03 million in face value.
- Per RIP's criteria, these accounts belong to those currently least able to pay.
- The top 10 counties where medical debt is being abolished by this partnership are: Clarke, Franklin, Hart, Stephens, Greene, Madison, Barrow, Jackson, Putnam and Oconee. Debt in these 10 counties accounts for \$9.4 million of the total.

- RIP is not a collection agency and will not attempt to recoup any payment from families or individuals. There are no strings attached; the debt for the qualifying accounts is fully abolished.
- This relief does not apply to debt individuals may owe to providers other than St. Mary's.

Recipients of debt relief will be notified by letter in an envelope from RIP Medical Debt, starting this week. The full roll-out of letters may take a couple of months due to volume of accounts being processed. These letters will include information on the past-due account(s) that qualified for medical debt elimination.

RIP has previously collaborated with other hospitals and healthcare systems, including [Ballad Health](#), [Vituity](#), [Children's Hospital of Alabama](#), and other healthcare providers.

If anyone wants to support continued debt relief in the Athens area, RIP is hosting a [fundraising page](#) for those who are interested.

The state of medical debt in the U.S.

- Unpayable medical debt is the leading cause of [bankruptcy](#).
- Despite over 90% of the country having some form of health insurance, Americans owe over [\\$195 billion](#) in medical debt.
- [Half of Americans](#) don't have \$500 for an unexpected medical bill.

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About St. Mary's

St. Mary's Health Care System, a member of Trinity Health, is a faith-based, not-for-profit health care ministry whose mission is to be a compassionate and transforming healing presence in the communities it serves. St. Mary's includes hospitals in Athens, Lavonia and Greensboro, as well as a multi-practice medical group, a retirement community, outpatient care facilities, graduate medical education, and a region-wide home health care/hospice service. St. Mary's Hospital in Athens is a certified chest pain center, a gold-plus hospital for stroke care, and was the first hospital in the state certified as a thrombectomy-capable stroke center. For more information, visit St. Mary's website at www.stmaryshealthcaresystem.org.

About RIP:

RIP Medical Debt is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit that was founded in 2014 by two former debt collectors. To date, RIP has acquired and abolished over \$8.5 billion of burdensome medical debt, helping 5.5 million families and addressing a major social determinant of health. RIP purchases debts for a fraction of their face value in bundled portfolios and partners with individuals, faith-based organizations, government, foundations and corporations to empower donors by converting every dollar contributed into \$100 of medical debt relief, on average.

RIP partners with hospitals and health systems and physician groups to acquire medical debt for abolishment. To learn more, visit: <https://ripmedicaldebt.org>.

A closer look at the 10 top counties*

County	Qualified accounts abolished	Qualified individuals helped	Total balance abolished
Athens-Clarke	3,334	2,102	\$2.024 million
Franklin	2,032	1,320	\$2.011 million
Hart	1,321	849	\$1.100 million
Stephens	877	582	\$891,000
Greene	1,154	665	\$692,600
Madison	840	575	\$592,000
Barrow	705	465	\$564,000
Jackson	708	482	\$552,000
Putnam	694	445	\$466,000
Oconee	570	376	\$461,000

* There are more accounts than individuals because some people had multiple accounts abolished.