

Today, Belinda and I are establishing a \$500,000 fund to protect East Idaho citizens from attorneys who appear to be using unscrupulous methods to take small debts of a few hundred dollars and transform them into huge debts of thousands of dollars by adding outlandish attorney fees.

This “scheme” has evidently been operating in East Idaho for some time. Idaho Falls attorneys Bryan Smith and Bryan Zollinger operate MRS, a collection agency specializing in medical debt. MRS employs the firm of Smith Driscoll and Associates which is also run by Mr. Smith and Mr. Zollinger. In other words, they essentially employ themselves to do the legal work for their own collection agency. Local doctors and hospitals employ MRS to collect past-due medical bills. These bills are often several years old. Sometimes the patient doesn’t even know there is still money owed.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Zollinger appear to be very sloppy in their work. Bills are sometimes sent to wrong names or wrong addresses. At first glance this might seem like just incompetence or carelessness. But when you look more closely, they appear to benefit from their own sloppiness. When they make a mistake, they have been known to charge the unsuspecting patients for attorney fees for the time it took to correct their own mistakes. In addition, they appear to bill for even tiny transactions. For example, when a patient makes a payment, they have been known to tack on another fee for simply processing the payment.

If someone tries to pay off the total amount owed, they will often get hit with a slew of unanticipated attorney fees totaling thousands of dollars for collection fees added on at the end after they thought they were all paid up.

When a judge awards attorney fees, MRS has been known to go back to court to ask the judge to reconsider the amount that was awarded. Then, unbelievably, they charge the patient for additional attorney fees because they spent time to increase the patient’s bill!

In a recent case involving a Melaleuca employee, MRS ran a \$294 medical expense to well over \$6500 with \$5864.25 in legal fees via a number of legal maneuverings. When East Idaho News reported on this story, dozens of people from all walks of life, including the legal and medical communities, came forward with similarly shocking stories. After all the publicity, Smith and Driscoll contacted the Melaleuca employee and promised to drop more than \$5000 in attorney fees if the employee would promise to not talk about it further. The employee refused to be silenced and rejected the offer.

Belinda and I have decided that we simply cannot stand by and allow our neighbors to go through the kind of financial duress and emotional pain that is apparently being perpetrated by MRS. Dozens or perhaps even hundreds of local families have been the targets of these aggressive tactics. Many find the behavior of these attorneys ruthless, unethical, and heartless. If the stories are true, it’s difficult not to agree. Fortunately, MRS seems to be the only collection firm that is operating with these principles.

Belinda and I have been blessed with more resources than we deserve. We have set aside \$500,000 into an account that will be used for defending people in East Idaho from unreasonable attorney fees by any collection company, including MRS.

We want to make clear that we believe that people should pay their bills. Doctors and hospitals have the right and the need to collect for services rendered. We will not be helping people avoid paying legitimate bills. But, going forward, we will be defending people from unscrupulous, unreasonable, or unnecessary attorney fees. We will also work to get Idaho's laws updated to protect citizens from unscrupulous attorneys.

Anyone with medical bills who is treated unfairly by any collection company from Southeast Idaho is a candidate for this protection. If you are such an individual, or know of such an individual please contact us confidentially at 208-534-2208 or [idahomedicaldebt@gmail.com](mailto:idahomedicaldebt@gmail.com). Or post publicly on our Facebook site "Idaho Medical Debt."

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Frank D. Vandebent".

The above words are my opinions derived from the facts as I understand them.