



Councilperson Michele Gregory

709 PARKWAY AVE
SALISBURY, MD 21804
443.669.3483
mgregory@salisbury.md

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My name is Michele Gregory and I am the council member for District 4 of the City of Salisbury, Maryland.

My family is no stranger to health issues. My oldest has a rare form of epilepsy called Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome, my other two children have their own health issues, and my husband had a stroke at 32 years old. At the time of his stroke, we were a single-income family living in subsidized housing. Even with good health insurance, the bills were huge. We had no income for the 6 months he was out of work, and went into \$15,000 of credit card debt just to survive. It took us years to pay off these debts and clear them off our credit history. Wage garnishments for medical bills would hit us out of the blue and often mean we had to make tough choices when it came to food and medicine and shelter.

Today, I represent a district filled with people facing these same choices every day. In Wicomico County, at least 13% of households are considered to be living in poverty according to the 2020 United Way's ALICE report – which is a higher percentage than the statewide average. Over the past ten years, hospitals have filed 14,617 lawsuits against Wicomico County residents to collect on medical debts. The median amount owed was \$496 and of these lawsuits, 7,102 resulted in wage or property garnishments.

No one should lose wages or their home because they went to the hospital for medical care. These nonprofit hospitals receive money from the state to provide care to low-income patients and medical debt is less than 5% of hospitals' income.

To solve this problem, HB565/SB514 will:

- Require that hospitals provide income-based repayment plans before suing a patient;
- Stop the practice of putting a lien on a home to repay a medical debt;
- Ban all lawsuits on medical debt that is \$1000 or less.

During a pandemic, when so many families have been struck with medical tragedy, we must work to fix this system. HB565/SB514 is a step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Michele Gregory

Salisbury City Council, District 4