



**Auto Consumer Alliance**  
13900 Laurel Lakes Avenue, Suite 100  
Laurel, MD 20707

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**Testimony to the House Economic Matters Committee**  
**HB 661 – Consumer Protection and Debt Collection – Exemption From Attachment and**  
**Requirements on Judgment Creditors**  
**Position: Favorable**

The Honorable C.T. Wilson  
House Economic Matters Committee  
251 Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
cc: Members, House Economic Matters Committee

Feb. 20, 2024

**Honorable Chair Wilson and Members of the Committee:**

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a nonprofit group that works to protect Maryland consumers and secure safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and car buyers.

We support **HB 661** because it takes important steps to protect a basic income for Marylanders struggling with wage garnishment as a result of debt – and to give those individuals and families a better chance to meet their basic needs.

Under current Maryland law, debtors can exempt from garnishment just the greater of \$450/week or 75% of their weekly wages. With the United Way calculating the average food bill for a family of four at about \$300/week and the average cost of a 2-bedroom apartment in Maryland (according to Zillow) now \$1,824/month, that level of exemption barely leaves a family enough income to eat and pay their rent, let alone pay for medical care and meet their many other expenses. While the existing standard was updated in 2020, given the rising cost of living it just isn't adequate to make ends meet today.

**HB 661** would push give that exemption level a meaningful boost– protecting the greater of \$750/week or 85% of a person's earnings from garnishment. For people struggling to meet their basic needs, that extra several hundred dollars in protected income per month could well make the difference between paying their rent and getting evicted, being able to buy basic medicines and going without, or between feeding their family adequately and serious food insecurity.

Importantly, the bill would also index those wage protection standards to the CPI-U; that will enable those standards to keep pace with inflation -- and safeguard a more adequate income than our current exemption standards now allow -- in the years to come.

**We support HB 661 and ask you to give it a FAVORABLE report.**

Sincerely,  
Franz Schneiderman  
Consumer Auto