

HB0647 - Courts - Remote Public Access  
Testimony in **Support**

To: Chair Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee  
From: Arielle Juberg, Baltimore MD 21234

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) in Baltimore. SURJ is also working in collaboration with Out for Justice and Life After Release. I am testifying in **support** of HB0647, Courts - Remote Public Access.

HB0647 is important to me because I believe transparency and accountability must be part of our government. This is especially true in processes involving crime and the possibility of incarceration. So much of our lives is navigated online; we file taxes, hold meetings with elected representatives, and complete MVA processes online. It is also time for public court proceedings to be truly accessible to Maryland residents.

The pandemic forced us to create new processes. Remote access to court proceedings is one example of a pandemic adaption that should remain. During the pandemic, Maryland adopted virtual court access to protect the health of courtroom participants. As the pandemic has continued, some counties, like Baltimore County, have returned to in-person hearings *with no virtual access*. Not only do courtroom participants deserve safety as the uncertainty of the pandemic continues, but easier access provides additional benefits to our communities and should become the standard.

Public access to court proceedings ensures that errors, oversights, and injustices are visible to the public. Two tools that provide public accountability are court watch programs and the media. The Prince George's County court watch has been operating with virtual access over the last few years. Court watch programs like these are vital because they gather real-time, objective data about the court system and they hold officials accountable who have been shown to misuse their position within the courtroom.

Virtual court access also makes attending easier for the press. Local news sources are already struggling, and sending a reporter to the courthouse to wait for a trial is a challenge. Virtual access makes local coverage of the courts more attainable. Taking away virtual access to the courts undermines their integrity and undercuts the public's confidence in the judicial process, which is the cornerstone of our judiciary. Enabling public access elevates our justice system to the highest standard of accuracy and integrity.

The pandemic has shown us that virtual access is possible. Increasing access for journalists, court watch programs, and family and community members will build a more trustworthy, equitable court system. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB0647**. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service.

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