



## House Bill 647

### *Courts - Remote Public Access*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**  
**WITH AMENDMENTS**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: February 23, 2022

From: D'Paul Nibber and Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 647 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill would, with certain exceptions, require courts across the state to provide remote audio-visual access to all public proceedings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited in-person access to many functions of government. This bill is presumably proposed to ensure public access to our courts and create an added measure of transparency. The merits of this policy argument are not the source of MACo's concerns – our views are merely cost-driven.

Circuit courts across the state are funded by county governments, with only specific functions reimbursed by State funding. The required audio-visual equipment under HB 647 is often expensive and difficult to retrofit into older courtrooms.

MACo suggests the following amendment to help ensure HB 647 is successfully implemented with resources from the State for its courts:

- On page 2, line 6, between "(A)" and "EACH" insert "**SUBJECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING IN THE STATE BUDGET,**"

HB 647 would modernize our courts and add a degree of transparency, but would benefit from an amendment eliminating the potentially substantial financial burden on local governments. For this reason, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 647.