

Yonée Gibson Testimony

Hi, my name is Yonée Gibson, I am a court watcher and am writing in support of virtual access. I have court watched with PG county virtually from Memphis, TN. I believe that loved ones should have support regardless of where people are. Virtual Court gave me the ability to be present digitally when I physically could not. Virtual access in the age of covid and beyond is crucial for vulnerable members of our communities. Requiring physical presence punishes mostly poor people and our courtrooms should be the place where it is most equitable. Equity should be guaranteed for all regardless of resources or how much support they have.

Why should you pass this bill?

- **Greater transparency and accountability.** Virtual court access ensures that the public has safe, affordable, and meaningful opportunities to observe their legal system at work. With greater public access to court comes greater transparency and accountability.
- **Accessibility for loved ones and more equitable public participation.** While courts are technically “open” to the public, the challenges of coming to court -- the cost of transportation, the impossibility of taking time off from work, struggle with child care, and disabilities -- erect barriers of entry that disproportionately affect low-income communities. Virtual court access ensures families and loved ones can be present to support defendants, victims, and witnesses in their proceedings.
- **Foster civic engagement.** As city hall proceedings and public meetings become more widely accessible virtually, so too should court proceedings. If the everyday happenings of our government and judiciary are more accessible, the public will be more civically engaged and invested.
- **Foundational Right.** The First Amendment and Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution guarantee open public access to court proceedings. As the world becomes more virtual due to the pandemic, it is imperative that rights keep up with the times to ensure fairness and transparency.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I urge you to support this legislation.

