

Eileen Martinez Drucker Belinkie Testimony

Hello, my name is Eileen Martinez Drucker Belinkie and I am writing today in support of virtual access to courts. As a Maryland voter, I urge your support of this legislation. Citizen participation & court access is essential to a fair transparent court system. This is vital for citizens to maintain faith & confidence in our system & strive for improvements.

Court language is often inaccessible and It's important to have the community understand our court system and be able to see it in action.

I became interested in watching proceedings and trials of the George Floyd & Ahmaud Arbery murder cases. If technology enables us to have public/open courts, it should be standard, remote proceedings are safer in these times of Covid susceptibility.

Why else should you support this legislation?

- **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 your time and consideration. Please support the proposed legislation.

