

Caitlin Fitzpatrick Testimony

Hello, my name is Caitlin Fitzpatrick. I am a Maryland voter and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this legislation. I am writing to urge my support.

I always see increased accessibility and transparency as a positive thing. If people know more about what is going on in the systems that affect them, they can be more informed and make better decisions for themselves and their loved ones. In my opinion, this is a no-brainer. It's our constitutional right to observe court proceedings. And I firmly believe that justice dies in empty courtrooms.

I care so much about this bill, in large part because the people being subjected to poor treatment are my neighbors, my friends, my loved ones. I care about my community and want to see them thrive. As the court system currently stands, it's not possible for my community to thrive and I know we can do better. My experience with Virtual Court has been eye-opening, but I also think it can be improved greatly. Making Virtual Court accessible is only the first step. For instance, for a while, we could only hear audio, which made it increasingly difficult to know exactly what was going on in the courtroom. Not only was there poor audio quality at times, but without seeing the faces and body language of those involved, we are missing key factors that allow us to assess the actions of those players in the court system.

I would like to note that I think all players involved here want the same thing: we all want the justice system to be just. This is a common ground we can all agree on and work towards. I know some folks have privacy concerns, and I believe that is entirely valid. That's why we as court watchers understand that judges will be the ones to ultimately decide if they believe the case is too sensitive to be open to the public, or if they feel it would do more harm than good. An example of this might be a particularly violent sexual abuse case or any case involving the abuse of children. I understand the rights of the alleged victims in these cases and I empathize with them. I want to ensure that

justice is served for both the alleged victims and the alleged perpetrators, and we believe increased transparency is the first step to ensuring justice for all.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. Please extend this opportunity to be involved in direct democracy through our criminal justice system by passing this legislation.