



City of Mount Rainier

One Municipal Place, Mount Rainier, MD 20712

Phone 301-985-6585 Fax 301-985-6595

Incorporated 1910

Honorable Mary Ellen Barbera, Chief Judge
50 Maryland Avenue Rockville, MD 20850
240-777-9320

Honorable Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera,

We are writing to express our appreciation for improving access to Prince George's County courts during this past year by establishing virtual, or remote, access. Virtual access has drastically lowered the cost and inconvenience to our residents who need to use the court system and has increased confidence in our judicial system. The residents of Mount Rainier are sometimes summoned before the courts, or they wish to support a loved one there, and this has, traditionally, entailed considerable cost because in-person court appearances require a day off from work with lost wages. In addition, public transportation to the Circuit Court from Mount Rainier can take more than four hours round trip. Our elderly or physically impaired residents find this journey daunting. A taxi or Uber rider from Mount Rainier costs more than \$100 round trip. Before virtual access, some of Mount Rainier residents traveled to courts in PG County only to find the courtrooms already filled to capacity and so they were abruptly shut out of the court proceedings.

Virtual access during this past year has been a blessing for Mount Rainier and Rt 1 corridor residents and we are requesting that the courts in Prince George's County remain as open, accessible, and transparent as they have become during this past year. Courts are a vital part of our civic life, and we are committed to ensuring that our residents have full faith and confidence in the integrity of the judicial process. Virtual access during this past year has improved public understanding of our court system and enabled our residents to participate with greater ease and less personal and financial cost. And, as the Supreme Court noted in Press-Enterprise Co. v. Superior Court of Riverside County, 464, U.S. 502, 508 (1984), regarding the public's ability to access court proceedings, "Openness thus enhances both the basic fairness of the criminal trial and the appearance of fairness so essential to public confidence in the system."

We are asking that Prince George's County courts remain as they have during this past year and continue to allow those who wish to participate at a distance to continue to access the courts virtually.

Thank you.

Celina Benitez

Mayor of City of Mount Rainier

On Behalf of the City of Mount Rainier