

Jen Ruffner Testimony

My name is Jen Ruffner and I am a court watcher with Courtwatch PG. I am also a concerned Maryland resident and constituent. I am writing today in support of the virtual access bill.

I started court watching because I wanted to play some small part in ensuring our legal system is as transparent and accountable as possible. I quickly came to see that the simple act of showing up isn't so small after all. The mere presence of court watchers can have an effect on everyone involved. It shows the person accused has a community that cares about the protection of his or her constitutional rights. It shows the person to whom the alleged harm has been done that the community sees and hears them. It shows the judge that the person standing before them is not a "defendant," but a person – with loved ones, co-workers, and community.

If the judicial system is not open and transparent, citizens are left out of a process that alters the lives of so many people, disproportionately Black and brown. This legislation does not call for transformation or change, it just calls for access – something that takes so little of the state, but makes such a difference to its citizens

Virtual court has allowed me to witness how arbitrary and random the judicial system is. It has shown me that someone's experience comes down to the luck of the draw - which judge, which mood that judge is in, what day of the week it is. Justice is not blind, but through virtual court access, we can start to see what needs to be fixed.

I urge you to support this legislation in order to increase the accessibility and fairness of the court system. Thank you for your attention and consideration.