



Dear Delegate Moon:

Court Watch Montgomery wants to thank you for sponsoring H8647, providing remote audio-visual access to Maryland court proceedings. For twelve years, Court Watch has sought to protect domestic violence victims by being the "eyes" in the court room. Hundreds of our volunteers have sat in the court rooms and observed more than 11,000 District Court hearings, systematically collecting data and noting both concerns and promising practices during domestic violence hearings.

When the courts were shut down due to COVID-19, our staff and volunteers scrambled to get access to proceedings via Skype, Zoom and audio streams. We could relay many frustrations with access to and quality of various platforms, but in the end, we learned how important virtual access can be, especially if the technology is adequate. Like other court watches, Court Watch Montgomery needs remote access to put more eyes on the courts by involving volunteer monitors who cannot attend court in Person.

Court Watch supports presumptive virtual access to domestic-violence court proceedings, so long as courts maintain the same level of confidentiality and safety as in-person proceedings. Virtual access should be sufficiently clear and audible to enable those with access to follow the proceedings.

Thank you again for leading this effort to improve access, transparency, and accountability in our state courts.

Sincerely,

Gail Nachman
Interim Director Court Watch Montgomery