

January 23, 2023
Testimony of Teagan Murphy
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10410 Montrose Ave
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In favor of: SB0043
An Act Concerning Courts – Remote Public Access

My name is Teagan Murphy. I am a resident of Bethesda, MD and a doctoral candidate and teaching assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am also a volunteer for Courtwatch PG, an advocacy group that observes bail hearings in the Prince George’s County District Court to document our county’s policies in action and hold officials accountable for injustice in the court system. I am writing in support SB0043.

When remote public access first became widespread during the rise of COVID in 2020, community members quickly realized that this was a critical tool for maintaining transparency, accessibility, and accountability in the courts as well as a benefit to all who are involved in the court system. Remote access allows community participation and family support for those who are incarcerated. Many courthouses are located in remote areas that can be difficult to reach on public transportation. Furthermore, community members often struggle to take off work, secure childcare, and find the means of transportation to come to court, making in-person court attendance inaccessible – particularly when you are not the person summoned to court. Remote access means that community members can more easily appear as character witnesses and moral support.

However, as court hearings have gradually returned to in-person proceedings, remote public access has been reduced, with some advocating for its removal entirely. Court access creates transparency and accountability; without it there is no public oversight. Since remote public access became available, Courtwatch volunteers like me – who rely on remote access as a means for advocacy – have consistently observed judges and other state actors harming our most vulnerable community members. This includes maintaining unaffordable bonds, ignoring extreme medical needs and other extenuating circumstances, openly mocking defendants, and incarcerating defendants for upwards of several months before their trial has even taken place. Without remote access, these acts of harm would remain largely hidden and overlooked. Injustice happens in empty courtrooms.

For the reasons above, I support SB0043. I hope the Judiciary Committee votes favorably.

Thank you for your time,
Teagan Murphy