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Steward
Solidarity Law Cooperative
January 20, 2023



In favor of: S.B. 43/H.B 133 An Act Concerning Courts
Remote Public Access

Dear Maryland General Assembly,

My name is Tara Vassefi and I am a DC-based attorney specialized in the use of disruptive technologies and digital evidence. I happened to be one of the earliest thought leaders at the nexus of law, technology, and human rights through my work in humanitarian law and war crimes prosecutions in late 2013, at a time when there was no binding or even persuasive authority on how courts should admit and weigh what we were calling at the time "unique evidence" like social media posts, YouTube videos and the like. **Today I am writing to express my support of S.B. 43/H.B 133, legislation that aims to enhance accountability and transparency in Maryland courts.** If passed, this bill would require every court in the state to provide the public with remote audio-visual access to all criminal and civil proceedings.

Advances in legal-tech are often seeded by the most vulnerable amongst us because their innovation is based on necessity rather than choice. I personally first observed this through the courage and sacrifice of citizen journalists documenting the largest crime base in human history - the conflict in Syria that began in the era of the Arab Spring in 2011. Through my work with and after the War Crimes Research Office at American University Washington College of Law, I developed valuable expertise in the balance between the rapid proliferation of disruptive technologies that could be used as digital evidence and the duty facing legal systems around the world in absorbing and adjusting to technological advancement. I published a book on this topic, "Video as Evidence in the Middle East and North Africa," and secured a [visiting position](#) at UC Berkeley School of Law, which houses the flagship [Human Rights Investigations Lab](#) - an incubator for students and practitioners to improve methodologies in verifying publicly available information on potential war crimes and hate crimes; to conduct open source investigations for international organizations, news outlets, and courts; and to rapidly respond to human rights crises. This early expertise, particularly on authentication and verification technologies like Blockchain, Computer Vision, and Machine Learning, became very useful to hackers and developers and shortly thereafter I was recruited into the tech industry to provide legal and policymaking [guidance to socially-minded tech companies](#) on how their solutions could be most beneficial to the Public Interest.

Activated by the systemic vulnerabilities highlighted by the Covid-19 Pandemic, I was fortunate enough to find the DC Mutual Aid Network and carry-on the long, rich legacy of mutualism in the DMV area. I came across Life After Release ("LAR") through their crucial work on Participatory Defense - taking mutual aid to the courtrooms - and since then I have been doing everything I can to remain in their orbit and learn from These Brilliant Innovators like LAR ED Qiana Johnson and LAR Director of Court Watch & Judicial Accountability Dr. Carmen Johnson about the True meaning of Justice.

I am writing to you now to underscore the necessity of Senate Bill 43 and House Bill 133. These widely-popular pieces of legislation are crucial steps to bringing our legal system up to speed with the scientific, technological, and social advancements of our Times. I am thoroughly convinced by LAR's empirical approach, evidence-based practices, and robust data collection results that prove how adoption of this legislation will, among countless other benefits:

- 1.improve access to justice
- 2.increase participation
- 3.improve the efficiency of our legal system
- 4.mitigate the harms and effects of overloaded dockets
- 5.improve transparency and therefore Community trust

I am well-versed in the counter-arguments and hesitation around this advancement and in close Community with other respected thought leaders who are eager to mindfully leverage technology for justice and accountability. If you have any questions for me, I would relish an opportunity to engage on this fascinating and dynamic topic with you or any member of your staff - please feel free to email me or reach out directly at 202.344.9763.

Thank you so much for your time, consideration, and your dedication to the Public Good. I look forward to observing and tracking how you make this choice to advance access to justice and help keep us all safe. Please consider this support letter to also serve as my written testimony.

In Community,

Tara Vassefi, Esq.

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