

January 15th, 2023
67 Spear Street
Burlington VT, 05405

Testimony of Sophie Holmes
In favor of: S.B.43

My name is Sophie Holmes. I am a resident of Bethesda, Maryland, but I'm attending college at the University of Vermont. I am a volunteer of CourtwatchPG (Prince George's County), an organization that observes and documents information from bail hearings in order to hold officials accountable for injustices in the court system. I am writing in support of S.B. 43. I support this bill because it is highly important that court hearings are transparent and that judges are held accountable for their decisions. Continuing to allow remote access to court hearings means that more people will be able to observe the justice system, leading to a more equitable system overall.

I am writing to support the bill because of the things I have observed as a court watcher. So many people are subjected to injustices everyday: being kept in jail because of an unaffordable bond, or being denied their medication and sent to mental health court, or ending up back in jail because of inability to receive their hearing date notices due to homelessness. This bill is very important because allowing more people to observe court is the first step to fixing problems like these, and the fact that these issues predominantly affect people of color is unjust. Remote access to courts is vital to the community because transportation costs are rising, and many people are busy with jobs and other circumstances, yet everyone still has a right to open and public courts.

I believe that legislators should support this bill because it will allow for more equality and transparency in the court system, and equality/justice is what a court system should strive for. In addition, many people cannot come to court in person because of their circumstances, such as not being able to afford the cost of public transportation and the inability to take enough time off work to attend the hearing. This means that the population able to attend court hearings in person is disproportionately skewed towards those who can afford to, which is unfair. By continuing to allow remote access to courts, people of all economic backgrounds will be able to attend court hearings. In addition, it makes it easier for family members and friends to attend their loved one's hearing, for the same reasons mentioned above.

For the reasons above, I support S.B.43, and I hope the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee votes favorably.
Thank you for your time,
Sophie Holmes