

January 16, 2023

Testimony of John Appiah-Duffell

4N Gardenway
Greenbelt, MD, 20770

In favor of: Senate Bill 43
An Act Concerning Courts – Remote Public Access

My name is John Appiah-Duffell, and I am a resident of Greenbelt, MD. I volunteer for Courtwatch PG, where I observe bail hearings to bear witness to the operations of our justice system. I am writing in support of SB 43. Simply: I believe remote access to court proceedings must be protected and expanded not only for the sake of public accountability, but for the sake of fair access and the ability of families and loved ones to be present regardless of extenuating circumstances.

Prior to joining Courtwatch PG, my understanding of the criminal justice system was defined mostly by fictional portrayals in media. My first hour of observation in 2020 was revelatory: one defendant denied a hearing because he did not speak English, another's pleas for prescribed medication ignored, and officials too consumed with moving cases through the system at a steady clip to see the human in front of them.

Defendants are often joined in the courtroom by loved ones who have made the trip to Upper Marlboro to show their love and support. Often, however, we hear that loved ones are unable to make the trip due to lack of transportation, lack of childcare, mobility issues, or other extenuating circumstances. Remote court access ensures that loved ones can be present to support defendants, victims, and witnesses in their proceedings—regardless of barriers which disproportionately impact low-income communities and those with disabilities.

It's often said that sunlight is the best disinfectant. I myself was unable to serve as a court watcher until the start of the pandemic, when the Prince George's County District Court offered Zoom access. However, our remote access has been severely cut back in recent months, and when offered, the feed may be inaudible or sporadic, with questionable recourse. How can sunlight serve to disinfect when the windows are boarded up?

I support SB 43 for the reasons above, and I hope the Judicial Proceedings Committee votes favorably.

Thank You,
John Appiah-Duffell

January 16, 2023

Testimony of John Appiah-Duffell

4N Gardenway
Greenbelt, MD, 20770

In favor of: House Bill 133
An Act Concerning Courts – Remote Public Access

My name is John Appiah-Duffell, and I am a resident of Greenbelt, MD. I volunteer for Courtwatch PG, where I observe bail hearings to bear witness to the operations of our justice system. I am writing in support of HB 133. Simply: I believe remote access to court proceedings must be protected and expanded not only for the sake of public accountability, but for the sake of fair access and the ability of families and loved ones to be present regardless of extenuating circumstances.

Prior to joining Courtwatch PG, my understanding of the criminal justice system was defined mostly by fictional portrayals in media. My first hour of observation in 2020 was revelatory: one defendant denied a hearing because he did not speak English, another's pleas for prescribed medication ignored, and officials too consumed with moving cases through the system at a steady clip to see the human in front of them.

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I support HB 133 for the reasons above, and I hope the Judiciary Committee votes favorably.

Thank You,
John Appiah-Duffell