

SUPPORT OF HB133 and SB43:

January 2023

Senator James Carew Rosapepe
James Senate Office Building, Room 101
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401
jim.rosapepe@senate.state.md.us

Delegate David Moon
Taylor House Office Building, Room 101
6 Bladen St.
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January 12, 2023

Dear Senator Rosapepe, Delegate Moon, and other members of the Maryland General Assembly:

My name is Janet Tupper. I have been a Maryland resident for over 35 years and a Prince George's County resident until recently. I support **HB133 and SB43** to require each court in the State to provide remote audio-visual access to all public court proceedings (unless a proceeding is deemed closed, confidential, or restricted by federal or State law).

In my volunteer work with CourtwatchPG, I have seen firsthand how important it is for the public to be aware of and provide accountability in the courts, correction facilities, and law enforcement. As a Caucasian resident I have had my eyes opened to the multitude of injustices that occur every day in our courtrooms that I have not experienced due to the protection of my skin color. Before I joined Courtwatch PG, I had little exposure to the day-to-day operations of the criminal justice system and what I have observed as a court watcher has shocked me. I have seen countless individuals subjected to routine humiliation and dehumanization as they go through court proceedings. I have seen community members subjected to racial profiling and illegal searches by police, denied pretrial freedom due to an inability to pay bond, denied medication in jail, and extenuating circumstances ignored. This is especially true for Black and brown people, who are disproportionately subject to unequal, unfair, and inhumane treatment by police, prosecutors, and judges alike.

I was heartened by the passing of the Police Accountability Act in 2021 and feel that allowing virtual court access is another tool for Maryland to be beacon to other states for enabling transparency in the legal system. Public access to judicial proceedings is a hallmark of democratic government and serves to promote accountability within the legal system. The pandemic has highlighted the importance—and feasibility— of providing the public with access to court proceedings virtually, including via telephonic and videoconferencing technologies.

My experience with CourtwatchPG has shown me that virtual access is possible and necessary. As newspaper headlines continue to remind us, mass incarceration, over-policing and over-criminalization of Black and brown communities continues unabated, despite widespread protests, lawsuits, press coverage, and grass roots efforts to bring about change. The public needs to be aware to continue to press for change. Increasing access for journalists, court watch programs, family and community members will build a more trustworthy, equitable court system. For the reasons above, I support HB133 and SB43. I urge the Judiciary Committee to vote favorably.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Janet Tupper,
Maryland resident, volunteer with CourtWatchPG
6 West Pennington Street Oakland MD 21550