

Fiona Apple
Courtwatch PG

January 23, 2023
Los Angeles
California

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

My name is Fiona Apple and although I do not reside in Maryland, I have been courtwatching for Prince George’s county for two years and I am honored to have ties to this community. I could go on and on about the injustices I have witnessed and try to appeal to the humanity of the government but instead I will focus on the logic of granting remote video access.

We had Zoom access for many months during the height of the pandemic when everyone was equal in the regard that no one was able to attend court in person. When the courts opened their virtual doors we were reminded that so many people were already unable to attend court in person. People with disabilities who cannot make the physical trip to court. People with jobs where they can’t get time off to make the physical trip to court. People who lack the funds and the means to make the physical trip to court. The courts opened their virtual doors because it was the right thing to do. It is still the right thing to do. We had Zoom access until it was suddenly taken away and then we were left with audio that could hardly be called access. Many days, a person calling in to court would not be able to identify who is speaking. Proceedings continue to be delayed and cases postponed as we have found the audio quality changes constantly.

People have a constitutional right to open and public courts and people have the right to participate in their own defense. The audio “access” we have presently does not allow the judges to hear the defendants and sometimes vice versa. This violates the defendants’ constitutional rights.

We know it is possible to have video access because we have had it before—but I only found out recently that DC already has video access in place and it seems to be working fine — so it’s very hard to see what the hold up is, unless the government of Maryland wants to hide what is happening inside its courtrooms the way a bad police officer wants to turn off his body camera.

If I could courtwatch virtually where I live, I would. But I’m glad that I’ve been a courtwatcher for PG County because it has taught me that community can stretch far across state lines and that being a good neighbor is possible even if you don’t live right next door.

This legislation would make Maryland leaders on the way to a more just, transparent, and accountable system that will protect the trust of the public you are meant to serve.

It is constitutional, it is available, and it is the right thing to do.

Thank you.
Fiona Apple

P.S. You can view the video of my testimony [here](#).