



ENSURE THE PUBLIC HAS REMOTE ACCESS TO COURTS

What is remote court access?

Remote court access gives the public **remote access to court proceedings** via live audio and video streaming.

In 2020, the Supreme Court of Maryland **authorized remote access to courtrooms** in the state, facilitating the courts' performance of core functions during the pandemic.

Remote court access for the public is **in no way a replacement** for in-person legal proceedings themselves.

Why does remote court access matter?

Greater transparency and accountability. Remote court access ensures that the public has safe, affordable, and meaningful opportunities to observe their legal system at work. With greater public access to court comes greater accountability.

Foundational Right. The First Amendment and Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution guarantee open public access to court proceedings. As the world becomes more virtual due to the pandemic, it is imperative that rights keep up with the times to ensure fairness and transparency.

Foster civic engagement. As city hall proceedings and public meetings become more widely accessible virtually, so too should court proceedings. If the everyday happenings of our judiciary are more accessible, the public will be more civically engaged.

Accessibility for loved ones and more equitable public participation. While courts are technically "open" to the public, the challenges of coming to court – the cost of transportation, taking time off from work, and child care – erect barriers of entry that disproportionately affect low-income communities. Remote court access ensures loved ones can be present to support defendants, victims, and witnesses in their proceedings.

What would legislation do?

Ensure that the public has audio-visual remote access to all criminal and civil proceedings unless otherwise exempted by law.

Legislation would simply **safeguard the remote access opportunities** already allowed by courts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensure judicial accountability moving forward. The absence of any safeguards to protect remote court access has already diminished the ability of community members to ensure equal justice for loved ones in the court system.

Through previous remote court access, advocates have **shed light on critical justice issues**, including individuals being unlawfully detained pretrial in PG County.