



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

(301) 952-3700
County Council

POSITION STATEMENT

HB 133

Delegate David Moon

Delegate Nicole A. Williams

The purpose of requiring each court in the state

to provide audio/visual access to all public court proceedings.

POSITION:

SUPPORT

HB 133- For the purpose of requiring each court in the state to provide remote audio-visual public access to all court proceedings. This bill authorizes remote participation in court proceedings by non-parties. HB 133 provides for the reporting and resolution of the malfunctioning of audio-visual public access systems. It authorizes remote participation in a court proceeding by a nonparty. It provides for the reporting and resolution of a malfunctioning of an audio-visual public access system, and generally relating to remote access to and participation in court proceedings. The effective date of the bill is October, 1 2023.

HB 133 proposes to create remote audio/visual access to individual members of the public and allows for greater transparencies in the judiciary process. The Prince George's County Council recommends the bill address the following items for maximum community participation. HB 133 should also address the types of technology that supports non-English speaking residents. The proposed changes for the Court should address the vast digital divide that separates so many poor and low-income residents. Access to technology is inequitable and there is a persistent socioeconomic "Digital Divide". There are Prince Georgians that do not have access to the technologies needed to participate in remote hearings conducted using online video conferencing. Considerations should be made for juvenile litigants as well as minors. On page 2, Section 1-206 (A) (3) states [Section (3) of HB 133 may provide such considerations stating, "Unless there is an overriding public interest compelling disclosure, a presiding judge may prohibit the broadcast of any portion of a proceeding on the request of any party, witness or counsel involved in the proceeding". This reminder is not to dissuade courts from adopting remote technologies, but access considerations should be creative and inclusive beyond blanket requirements for litigants and community members to participate in hearings remotely. Too often, defendants go into empty court rooms with no support, which could create a perception that no one cares about them. A more open and accessible court room, which is the goal of this bill can lead to more transparency in the process.

For the foregoing reasons we believe this legislation should be considered given the many community benefits pending any fiscal examinations. The Prince George's County Council respectfully requests a favorable report from the Committee on this legislation.



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Prepared by Green Consultants

On behalf of Prince George's County Council