

Testimony in support of HB8328,

Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings

April 9, 2026

To Chairperson McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Barbara Burke and I am a resident of Barrington. I am writing to express my strong support of HB8328, Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings.

We have seen too many instances in Rhode Island/Providence of people who are attending court hearings being taken by ICE, often without ICE having a judicial warrant. We have also seen cases of ICE profiling people at court and taking, or trying to take, people based on how they look. Many immigrants are trying to do the right thing following proper legal protocol and process for citizenship, yet are being profiled and incarcerated, often out of state. Clearly, those ICE detentions are violating due process and should not be happening. But since it is happening, and since the current presidential administration encourages it and the DOJ will not stop it, we in Rhode Island must take action. One of the ways we can protect people is to allow virtual or remote court hearings in all our courts. The current situation has put many people in an untenable position: either they show up to court for their assigned dates and risk being unlawfully detained by ICE, or they miss their scheduled court dates for fear of being detained and then face other consequences. Giving people a third option of having a virtual court hearing is the right thing to do given the current circumstances. During Covid, the courts managed to maintain court hearings via virtual and remote means. There is no reason it can't be an option for a safer process for marginalized citizens.

**Rhode Islanders want virtual court hearings!** More than 3,500 people have signed the petition for virtual court hearings. Every day that passes, more immigrant members of our community are being forcibly removed at court. Those are our fathers, mothers, classmates, neighbors, essential workers, tax payers, and friends. I urge the House Judiciary Committee to support and pass HB8328. Thank you for your consideration.

Gratefully,

Barbara Burke

Barrington