

Testimony in Support of House Bill H-8328: “An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Courts – Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings”

Dear Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of StandUp Rhode Island, I am writing in support of House Bill H-8328, “An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Courts – Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings. The act would permit all Rhode Island courts to conduct hearings remotely and allow any party or attorney to appear by telephone or video conference, with remote appearances having the same legal effect as in-person appearances.

Rhode Island courthouses are places where residents should be able to participate in the Rhode Island justice system without fear of unwarranted surveillance or enforcement actions. In November 2025, we saw how federal ICE agents target Rhode Island residents conducting business at Rhode Island court houses because they know the residents must appear in court physically. In response to the November 2025 mistaken arrest of a high school intern at the Providence County Superior Court, Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Suttell was quoted as saying “This egregious incident underscores both the community’s and the Judiciary’s concerns about how ICE is conducting its operations in Rhode Island. Given this climate, the judiciary understands the call to implement remote hearings in Providence County, and beyond.” This Bill will enhance access to virtual hearings and allow people to comply with legal obligations without fear that meeting their civic responsibilities will expose them to unrelated enforcement actions. Therefore, I urge you to support H-8328.

Sharon Wollschlager
123 Beach Road
Bristol, RI 02809