

Testimony in support of H-8328, Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings

April 8, 2026

To Chairperson McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Sheila O'Connell and I am a resident of Providence. I am writing to express my strong support of H-8328, Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings.

We have seen many instances this year and last year of people who are attending court hearings in Rhode Island being taken by ICE, most of the time 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.

Obviously these 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 of 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 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. The courts did it during the pandemic, and they can do it now.

I urge the House Judiciary Committee to support and pass H-8328.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Sheila O'Connell
Providence