



Judicial Conference of the United States
c/o Hon. Robert J. Conrad, Jr., Conference Secretary
Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building
One Columbus Circle NE
Washington, D.C., 20002

January 30, 2026

Dear Members of the Judicial Conference:

I write today to ask that you add the following item to the agenda of your semiannual meeting scheduled for March 10: amending the Conference's audio policy to permit U.S. District Court judges to authorize live public access to civil trials and to hearings in other civil cases that include witness testimony.

The Conference's current policy, which only allows judges to authorize live audio in non-trial proceedings in which witnesses do not appear, is unnecessarily restrictive. It prevents Americans, regardless of where we live, from being able to hear sworn first-hand accounts about what's happening on the ground in disputes across the country, from inside federal buildings in Washington, D.C., to the streets of Minneapolis to prisons and detention facilities nationwide.

More Americans are paying attention to the federal courts now than when the most recent audio policy update occurred in 2023, and many remain perplexed about how our courts operate.¹ Giving district judges the agency to permit livestreaming of civil trials and civil hearings that feature testimony would go a long way toward resolving both issues: it would help convey the seriousness with which judges are fulfilling their duties, no matter which president appointed them; it would act as a vote of confidence in the way in which judges nationwide manage their courtrooms; and it would give average Americans the access and respect we deserve.²

Restricting public access to trials and other proceedings of national import is a choice, one that largely rests on your shoulders. For the sake of maintaining the public's faith in our courts at this critical moment, please make a different one.³

Sincerely,
Gabe Roth
Executive Director
Fix the Court

¹ There are polls too numerous to list that prove this point, but for more anecdotal evidence, see, e.g., "3 judges on the shifting role and perception of the federal judiciary," Johns Hopkins University in D.C., Oct. 14, 2025: "In the almost four years that Judge Gabriel Sanchez has served as a circuit judge, [...he's] noticed more confusion about the role of judges, what they can and can't do, and what they we can and cannot talk about. 'The biggest changes have been the combination of feeling like I've needed to educate the public more about what we do and taking on some of those issues,' Sanchez said." Available at <https://washingtondc.jhu.edu/news/scotusblog-judiciary-role>.

² It's always possible that someone will record the audio and manipulate it to fit some partisan narrative. But that possibility is somewhat remote, and any manipulations could be easily rebutted by the hundreds or thousands of people who tuned in to the original livestream.

³ It goes without saying that there need not be three years of study, or the convening of the Committee on Court Administration and Case Management, to make this decision. Live audio with witness testimony is something that is permitted in one form or another, and occurs regularly without incident, in all 50 U.S. states, and federal judges no doubt have the wherewithal to pause the audio feed should, say, a minor or a victim of domestic violence be testifying.