



MEMO OF SUPPORT

S462-A (Hoylman-Sigal / A1518-A (Weprin))

Authorizes the use of cameras in New York State's appellate and trial courts

March 28, 2025

TITLE OF BILL

An act to amend the judiciary law, in relation to audio-visual coverage of judicial proceedings; and to repeal section 218 of the judiciary law and section 52 of the civil rights law relating thereto.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

Reinvent Albany supports this legislation because allowing cameras in the courtroom would substantially increase the transparency of court proceedings and bring New York in line with the practices of nearly all other states. According to the Fund for Modern Courts, New York is an “extreme outlier among the states” as one of only three jurisdictions that ban cameras in trial court proceedings, along with Louisiana and the District of Columbia (D.C. has a blanket ban for all local court proceedings at the trial and appellate levels). Forty-eight other states allow audio-video coverage of trial and appellate court proceedings, though the rules and conditions for cameras vary.

We also strongly support the requirement that livestreaming of court proceedings be provided by the Office of Court Administration, with archived video provided on a public website. Currently, only the state of Michigan livestreams nearly all court proceedings throughout the state, according to the Fund for Modern Courts. If passed and fully funded, this legislation would make New York a national leader in courtroom transparency.

While Reinvent Albany would prefer to have as few exceptions as possible to allowing cameras in New York's courtrooms, the legislation provides a framework for prohibiting

filming of particular individuals that is similar to many other states that allow cameras in courtrooms.

We urge the Legislature to pass this bill and monitor its implementation to ensure that it allows for the greatest amount of public access, while balancing the need for safety and fairness for those participating in court proceedings.

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS

Section 1 repeals and replaces Section 218 of the Judiciary law, which authorized an “experimental” program for cameras in courtrooms that expired in 1997, to permanently authorize audio-visual (AV) recordings in judicial proceedings in appellate and trial courts through the following framework:

- Free live-streaming of judicial proceedings would be provided by the Office of Court Administration (funding would need to be appropriated by the Legislature to accomplish this). Video feeds would be accessible from a publicly available website, with archived video of all recordings.
- The following shall be permitted in trial or appellate court proceedings:
 - At least one compact video camera must be allowed, each operated by not more than one camera person.
 - Not more than one audio system for radio broadcasts would be allowed.
 - Additional equipment or personnel shall be up to the judge.
 - Pooling (having one member of the media share their coverage with other outlets) would be the responsibility of the media.
- Video and audio equipment that produces distracting sound or light, as well as artificial lighting equipment, shall be prohibited.
- Video and photography equipment shall be positioned in locations designated by the judge presiding over the proceeding.
- Equipment shall not be placed in or removed from the courts except before or after proceedings, or during recess.
- Use of additional lighting paid for by the media must be approved by the presiding judge.
- AV coverage shall not be admissible as evidence in the proceeding or related cases/appeals.
- Restrictions on video and audio coverage:
 - Conferences by counsel with their clients or the judge at the bench may not be recorded or broadcast to protect attorney-client privilege and right to effective counsel.
 - No conferences in chambers shall be broadcast.
 - Jury selection during voir dire shall not be broadcast.
 - The jury may not be covered, except for the foreperson during delivery of the verdict (provided both foreperson and judge give consent).

- No coverage shall be permitted of witnesses who served as undercover police or peace officers without their permission.
- No coverage shall be permitted of the victim in a crime of a sexual nature without their permission.
- Arraignment and suppression hearings shall not be covered without the consent of all parties.
- No proceeding shall be delayed at the request of news media.
- No coverage shall be permitted if the presiding judge decides it could endanger the safety of any person.
- Coverage may not focus on the family member of a victim or party in the trial, except when that member is testifying. Media shall make good-faith attempts to identify these members to prevent such coverage.
- Presiding judges may prohibit filming or photographing of particular participants with the following requirements:
 - An order restricting AV coverage must be in writing and part of the court record. The order must state good cause as to why the effect of AV coverage upon the individual is qualitatively different from other members of the public, or from other media coverage (i.e., different than coverage by print media). Before prohibiting AV coverage, the presiding judge must first consider the use of delayed, modified, or still AV coverage.
 - A presumption of good cause shall exist with respect to minors' testimony.
- No recordings can take place when the courtroom is closed.
- Reviews of orders restricting audio-visual coverage shall be expedited.

Section 2 repeals section 52 of the civil rights law.

Section 3 makes a technical amendment to subdivision 5 of section 751 of the judiciary law.

Section 4 sets the effective date as 90 days after becoming law.