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April 13, 2021

Honorable Lorena S. Gonzalez  
Chair, Appropriations Committee  
California State Assembly  
Capitol Building, Room 2114  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 716 (BENNETT) as amended March 25, 2021– SUPPORT**

Dear Assembly Member Gonzalez:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 716**. This bill is scheduled for hearing before Assembly Appropriations Committee on April 14, 2021.

AB 716 would modernize access to open court proceedings by requiring courts to provide remote access to the public.

The high transmission rate of COVID-19, initially shown by the number of new cases, and later by hospital admissions, created a greater need for remote work and remote events. However, as courthouses physically closed during the pandemic access for the public and media to legal proceedings was limited. Our judicial system remains an important part of society during these unprecedented times

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the need to provide more options for meaningful access to open court proceedings. AB 716 increases public transparency to one of our three branches of governments, by preserving the public and media's constitutional right to observe hearings using modern technologies.

People with various disabilities often have a difficult time traveling and getting to meetings and court proceedings in person. Court proceedings that are available to the public should be available and accessible to as many people as possible. This bill would help many with disabilities participate in court proceedings. The disability community has been advocating to be able to work from home and attend meetings from home through virtual platforms. This would be the most accessible way for many people with disabilities.

It is still important for these platforms to be accessible for people with all disabilities, including ASL interpretation, closed captions and assistive technology, such as screen readers for the deaf and hard of hearing community. The platform should also be accessible for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Liz Weintraub of the Association of University Centers on Disability stated, “organizers need to be patient with people with ID when explaining online platforms.” It is important that people with disabilities are part of the decision-making process when it comes to accessibility on virtual platforms for public meetings and hearings.<sup>1</sup>

The cost to make meetings virtual and accessible for people with disabilities is necessary to create a more inclusive environment that is equitable. Court procedures must be accessible for the public.

For these reasons, DRC supports this bill. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot on the "i" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Eric Harris  
Director of Public Policy  
Disability Rights California

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<sup>1</sup> How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible for the Disability Community. Rooted in Rights. <https://rootedinrights.org/how-to-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community/>. April, 2020 [“Return to Main Document”](#)

cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Appropriations Committee  
Honorable Steve Bennett, California State Assembly  
Alexander Soto, Legislative Director, Office of Assembly Member  
Bennett