

October 28, 2010

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: **Support S. 446 - Broadcast Coverage of the Supreme Court**

Dear Senator:

We write as representatives of organizations across the ideological spectrum that promote open governance and civic engagement to urge your support for S. 446, a truly bipartisan bill to permit broadcast television coverage of open Supreme Court proceedings. The Senate Judiciary Committee reported the bill on a bipartisan vote of 13-6.

Each of us fully endorses the view, first expressed by the Supreme Court in 1980, that "People in an open society do not demand infallibility from their institutions, but it is difficult for them to accept what they are prohibited from observing." In our view, camera coverage of Supreme Court oral arguments will lead to greater comprehension of our justice system. It will inure to the benefit of all Americans by heightening their awareness of one of the three co-equal branches of our Federal government.

The Court decides too many questions of monumental importance to the American people to deny them the opportunity to observe its proceedings. Even the majority of those who are able to visit the Court in person receive just three minutes to watch before they are shuffled out to make room for others waiting on line. The Court's public-seating area accommodates only 300 visitors. Not surprisingly, most Americans increasingly favor television coverage of the Court. A recent C-SPAN poll puts the number at 63%. Of the 37% who said they did not favor coverage, 60% changed their view upon being informed by the pollsters that seating is extremely limited and hearings are held in Washington. That raises the total number of respondents in favor of coverage to 85%.

The time has come for the Supreme Court to enter the 21st century and join the high courts of the United Kingdom and Canada by permitting broadcast television coverage of its open proceedings. We understand the objections some have raised against televising trials, especially criminal trials where the rights of defendants must necessarily be considered. We are, nonetheless, convinced that those objections generally do not translate to the appellate arena where there are no juries to be exposed nor witnesses to be intimidated. In addition, S. 446 anticipates such concerns and allows exceptions in the event camera coverage would violate the due process rights of any party.

In the spirit of open governance and empowering The People, we urge you to support S. 446 when it comes to the Senate floor.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Justice
American Association of Law Libraries
American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Society of News Editors

Association of Research Libraries
Bill of Rights Defense Committee
Brehner Center for Freedom of Information
Californians Aware: The Center for Public Forum Rights
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington
Common Cause
Consumer Action
DC Open Government Coalition
Defending Dissent Foundation
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Entertainment Consumers Association
Equal Justice Society
Essential Information
Feminists for Free Expression
First Amendment Foundation
Freedom of Information Center
Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas
Government Accountability Project
Lambda Legal
National Freedom of Information Coalition
New England First Amendment Coalition
Open Oregon: A Freedom of Information Coalition
OpenTheGovernment.org
Project On Government Oversight
The Advocacy Fund
The National Center for Lesbian Rights
The Reporters Committee
The Rutherford Institute
The Society of Professional Journalists
The Sunlight Foundation
Virginia Coalition for Open Government
Washington Coalition for Open Government