

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 917

To provide for media coverage of Federal court proceedings.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 12, 2015

Mr. KING of Iowa (for himself, Mr. DEUTCH, and Mr. CHAFFETZ) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL

To provide for media coverage of Federal court proceedings.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Sunshine in the Court-
5 room Act of 2015”.

6 **SEC. 2. FEDERAL APPELLATE AND DISTRICT COURTS.**

7 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

8 (1) PRESIDING JUDGE.—The term “presiding
9 judge” means the judge presiding over the court
10 proceeding concerned. In proceedings in which more
11 than 1 judge participates, the presiding judge shall
12 be the senior active judge so participating or, in the

1 case of a circuit court of appeals, the senior active
2 circuit judge so participating, except that—

3 (A) in en banc sittings of any United
4 States circuit court of appeals, the presiding
5 judge shall be the chief judge of the circuit
6 whenever the chief judge participates; and

7 (B) in en banc sittings of the Supreme
8 Court of the United States, the presiding judge
9 shall be the Chief Justice whenever the Chief
10 Justice participates.

11 (2) APPELLATE COURT OF THE UNITED
12 STATES.—The term “appellate court of the United
13 States” means any United States circuit court of ap-
14 peals and the Supreme Court of the United States.

15 (b) AUTHORITY OF PRESIDING JUDGE TO ALLOW
16 MEDIA COVERAGE OF COURT PROCEEDINGS.—

17 (1) AUTHORITY OF APPELLATE COURTS.—

18 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided
19 under subparagraph (B), the presiding judge of
20 an appellate court of the United States may, at
21 the discretion of that judge, permit the
22 photographing, electronic recording, broad-
23 casting, or televising to the public of any court
24 proceeding over which that judge presides.

1 (B) EXCEPTION.—The presiding judge
2 shall not permit any action under subparagraph
3 (A), if—

4 (i) in the case of a proceeding involv-
5 ing only the presiding judge, that judge de-
6 termines the action would constitute a vio-
7 lation of the due process rights of any
8 party; or

9 (ii) in the case of a proceeding involv-
10 ing the participation of more than 1 judge,
11 a majority of the judges participating de-
12 termine that the action would constitute a
13 violation of the due process rights of any
14 party.

15 (2) AUTHORITY OF DISTRICT COURTS.—

16 (A) IN GENERAL.—

17 (i) AUTHORITY.—Notwithstanding
18 any other provision of law, except as pro-
19 vided under clause (iii), the presiding judge
20 of a district court of the United States
21 may, at the discretion of that judge, per-
22 mit the photographing, electronic record-
23 ing, broadcasting, or televising to the pub-
24 lic of any court proceeding over which that
25 judge presides.

1 (ii) OBSCURING OF WITNESSES.—Ex-
2 cept as provided under clause (iii)—

3 (I) upon the request of any wit-
4 ness (other than a party) in a trial
5 proceeding, the court shall order the
6 face and voice of the witness to be
7 disguised or otherwise obscured in
8 such manner as to render the witness
9 unrecognizable for purposes of
10 photographing, recording, broad-
11 casting, or televising the witness de-
12 scribed in clause (i); and

13 (II) the presiding judge in a trial
14 proceeding shall inform each witness
15 who is not a party that the witness
16 has the right to request the image and
17 voice of that witness to be obscured
18 during the witness's testimony.

19 (iii) EXCEPTION.—The presiding
20 judge shall not permit any action under
21 this subparagraph if that judge determines
22 the action would constitute a violation of
23 the due process rights of any party.

24 (B) NO MEDIA COVERAGE OF JURORS.—

25 The presiding judge shall not permit the

1 photographing, electronic recording, broad-
2 casting, or televising of any juror in a trial pro-
3 ceeding, or of the jury selection process.

4 (3) INTERLOCUTORY APPEALS BARRED.—The
5 decision of the presiding judge under this subsection
6 of whether or not to permit, deny, or terminate the
7 photographing, electronic recording, broadcasting, or
8 televising of a court proceeding may not be chal-
9 lenged through an interlocutory appeal.

10 (4) GUIDELINES.—The Judicial Conference of
11 the United States may promulgate guidelines with
12 respect to the management and administration of
13 photographing, recording, broadcasting, or televising
14 described under paragraphs (1) and (2).

15 (5) SUNSET OF DISTRICT COURT AUTHORITY.—
16 The authority under paragraph (2) shall terminate
17 upon the expiration of the 3-year period beginning
18 on the date of the enactment of this Act.

19 (6) PROCEDURES.—In the interests of justice
20 and fairness, the presiding judge of the court in
21 which media use is desired has discretion to promul-
22 gate rules and disciplinary measures for the court-
23 room use of any form of media or media equipment
24 and the acquisition or distribution of any of the im-
25 ages or sounds obtained in the courtroom. The pre-

1 siding judge shall also have discretion to require
2 written acknowledgment of the rules by anyone indi-
3 vidually or on behalf of any entity before being al-
4 lowed to acquire any images or sounds from the
5 courtroom.

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