

Fiona Apple on Court Watch PG & Lawsuit

I'm going to talk about some things having to do with Court Watch. And the point of doing this is just to inform you because there's an entity trying to keep you all unaware of what's going on behind closed doors — *behind closed, barred doors*. Talking about jails and prisons, and I'm talking about courtrooms.

Courtrooms. Let's talk about courtrooms for a second; the physical courtroom.

The physical courtroom has a gallery of seats that's there for the press and for the public. Do you know why they have them there — because it's in the constitution, that it is our right to observe?

Now because of the pandemic, they had to shut down the courtrooms. And the good thing that happened because of that is that we got Zoom access and that meant that people who can't regularly make it to court were able to make it to court to support their loved ones, who were being brought there because they'd been arrested. It was an easy fix and there's no reason to take it away.

Okay, let me back up a second.

Let's say you're arrested — and it could happen to you, it could happen to me, it *did* happen to me — it could happen for the stupidest of reasons. Let's say you're arrested. First thing that happens is you're probably going to spend a night in jail.

Hopefully just one night; hopefully the next day you'll see a judge.

Hopefully you weren't arrested on a Friday.

Hopefully you weren't arrested and you speak another language and they don't have an interpreter for you.

Hopefully you... you know, it could go on and on.

Hopefully you see a judge the next day.

Next day in front of the judge, your lawyer or your public defender will tell the judge why you should be released before you have a trial.

Now remember, when you were up in front of the judge, when you were there for your bond review, you *haven't* been found guilty of anything. These are just allegations and you should be able to enjoy the presumption- the presumption of innocence.

The only two reasons that you should be kept — that you're supposed to be kept in jail before you've had your trial — is there's only two reasons. The first one is if there's clear and convincing evidence that you're a danger to the community. And the second reason is if there's clear and convincing evidence that you are a flight risk.

If you're neither of those two things, then you should either be let go on a promise to come back to court for no money — really, that should be the case — or if you're given a bond, it should be something that you can afford.

But you have to pay your way out, and sometimes these things are so [high] that people don't have enough money to pay them.

And the way they get treated in court, by the way! Oh, my god! I have heard the ASA go — I'm smacking my head right now — “*How could you have two kids and no job and you can't afford fifty bucks?*” I mean, I'm *me* and I'm not that out of touch to think that you should shit on somebody for not having fifty bucks. Like welcome to the fucking world lady! Anyway.

But I digress.

One of the craziest things that we see is that there's this thing called the Office of Pre-Trial Services. Pre-Trial is ‘very transparent’. No, they're *not*. They're not transparent at all.

We don't even know what they're made up of, who are their employees, how are their employees qualified? What we really don't know — and this is what I touched on in the question and answer thing on the fan site a while back — is that there's this thing called ‘pre-trial services’. And we hear a judge will order somebody released because they've been found not to be a danger to the community. They've been found not to be a flight risk, so they'll be [released], but they maybe need a supervised release. So they'll order them to Pre-Trial Services. They order them released on like ‘Pre-Trial Level 3’ or ‘4’ or something. I won't get into that right now.

But those are- but they'll order their release. What happens then? They're *not* released, even though the judge ordered their release. Who can go above a judge? *Pre-Trial Services*. Who is Pre-Trial Services? Fuck if I know, because they have no transparency.

And you know what else? They're backed up. They're backed up and yet anytime somebody says that they're backed up, that there's a four-week wait to be released, and they'll speak up and lie and say that there's no, ‘there's no delay’. Not to, you know- if you get held pre-trial, it's not just an inconvenience. You're traumatized.

And it's not just you.

You have kids who depend on you. They're fucked. If you can't find anybody else to care for them, they're fucked. If you have an older parent or relative that depends on you to help them, they're fucked.

If you had a job, you lost your job. Guess what happens then? You can't afford your rent. You lose your place. And then you become unhoused. And then next time you have a court date, you don't- you don't get the notice. And then they tell you, oh, you're [a] failure to appear. Means that you're a flight risk. And they keep you in jail *again*.

Every time you touch this system, it sticks to you.

But they're proven wrong by a handful of plaintiffs, supported by affidavits, declarations made by court watchers — including myself. Honest, completely honest affidavits based on the observations that we have made being court watchers.

I've been a court watcher for almost two years now. We just said what we saw to support these plaintiffs.

These plaintiffs have sued Pre-Trial and some judges in in Prince George's County.

What do you think happened when that lawsuit dropped?

They took our fucking Zoom access away.

So now we only have audio. But guess what? They don't have [multiple] mics in there. They have *one* for the judge. And we can hardly hear them. We can- it's like, it's like the fucking Charlie Brown shit. Or it's like... you know what it is? It's listening when you're in the subway. The New York subway, the announcements, it's like that.

How are we supposed to have our constitutional right to observe these courts or to help these people if we can't hear? And why did they take away this access right [after] this lawsuit was dropped? It really- it really seems like they're retaliating against us.

And if they're retaliating against us — I mean, man, what stupid asshole babies, huh?

Why would they take this access away right after we tried to hold them accountable; when the plaintiffs are trying to hold them accountable?

Why would they take our access away?

What would *you* think if a cop was walking towards you and took off their body camera? You'd be like, oh shit. This motherfucker is about to do something wrong and bad and he knows it.

What do you think it makes us feel like if they take away our Zoom access? We can't observe. When they take away our audio access, so we can't even call in? They provide that number because they're supposed to, but they fuck up the audio just to make it so that we can't hold them accountable.

And again, the reason that I'm doing this — besides having been asked to do this, I was asked by community that I love, and that I'm proud to be a part of, to do this — the reason is to inform you because they *don't want you to know*.

And I'm just hoping that by sending it to the places that I'm sending it to, that the audience that receives this is going to care and maybe have some ideas, but at least not be kept in the dark about this — because that's what *they* want.

I don't know exactly what to do about all this stuff except to just try to keep on court watching and to try to keep helping spread information — information that you have the right to know — and that someday if you are ever arrested, you would *need* to know. And your loved ones would need to know.

You think about all those people in there; there's thousands of people in there having their lives upended, having their whole family and communities... a ripple effect. Because Pre-Trial is not on their shit, because the loved one can't afford to get out, because they got forgotten.

Anytime you are experiencing any discomfort, just imagine what that would be like if you didn't have the luxury of being sick or sad *outside* of a cage, with no help, being treated like you're not even human.

Please care, *please* care about this.

I guess that's all. I'm sorry it's so long, but there's a lot to it.

Okay: thank you for listening. If you've listened this far, I hope I made some sense. And I hope that all the other people out there who do this work don't think that I did a bad job of this because I really- I just want you all to know what's going on.

Okay, bye.