

About Jury Service

Jury duty is one of the only opportunities citizens have to participate directly in our process of governance. And, unlike voting, it is mandatory, not discretionary. The Courts recognize that jury duty imposes a heavy burden on many citizens. Those who fulfill their civic duty will find that they are appreciated by the court system and often report that serving was a positive and educational experience.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO SERVE AS A JUROR?

To serve as a juror, one must be: a United States citizen and a resident of the county in which you are summoned; at least 18 years old; able to read, write and speak English; and must not have been convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than one year. Individuals age 70 or older are not required to serve, but they may serve if they wish.

HOW ARE JURORS SELECTED?

Jury selection begins when a name is randomly selected from a master list of prospective jurors in the county, compiled from various sources, including voter and motor vehicle registration lists, personal tax rolls and other sources. Those randomly selected citizens are sent a summons, which is a court order stating the required time and place to appear.

The jury pool is composed of those people summoned to appear on a particular day. Juries are selected from the jury pool. In criminal cases, the jury is made up of twelve jurors, except in the rare case of the parties agreeing to fewer. In civil cases, the jury can consist of as few as six jurors or as many as twelve. Alternate jurors may also be chosen to avoid unnecessary delays or expense in the event of the incapacity of a juror.

Are certain individuals exempt from jury service?

In Pennsylvania, no one is excused or exempt from jury duty except those who:

1. Are in active service of the Armed Forces;
2. Have served on jury duty within three years of their current summons. However, if such person served as a juror for fewer than three days, the exemption period is only one year; OR
3. Demonstrate to the court undue hardship or extreme inconvenience. You will be excused permanently or the length of time the court deems necessary.

What happens if I ignore my summons?

A juror summons is a court order. Any juror who fails to appear when summoned may be fined and/or imprisoned for contempt of court. 42 Pa. C.S. § 4584.

How often do I have to serve?

Following jury service, a citizen shall be exempt from jury duty for 3 years provided s/he served at least 3 days. Those who served for fewer than 3 days results in an exemption for one year. 42 Pa. C.S. § 4584.