

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is jury service important?

It is an essential responsibility of citizenship and is a way for each citizen to participate in upholding the rule of law. Jury duty can also be an educational experience as jurors learn more about the legal process.

What is my duty as a juror?

It is imperative that you remain fair and impartial when being presented with the facts of a case and then weigh the evidence with your fellow jurors to arrive at a verdict.

Is a person guaranteed the right to a trial by jury in every case?

No, there is no right to a trial by jury in every case. Certain civil cases, such as matters where a plaintiff seeks an equitable remedy for a loss or injury, are not usually afforded a jury trial. However, in criminal cases, the Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides the right to a trial by a public jury. All parties are considered equal before the law and are entitled to a fair and impartial trial.

What is a juror's role in a criminal case?

In a criminal case, the state, represented by the district or county attorney, presents evidence at trial to prove that the defendant, or person accused of committing a crime, has committed the charges against him or her "beyond a reasonable doubt." Jurors must consider all of the evidence presented at trial to determine whether the defendant is guilty. For a valid verdict, jurors must reach a unanimous decision.

What is a juror's role in a civil case?

Civil cases usually involve disputes between two or more parties regarding money or property. Based on the testimony and evidence, jurors must evaluate the questions surrounding the disputed facts of the case to arrive at a verdict.

In civil trials, an agreement of five-sixths of the jurors is needed for a valid verdict.

What are the types of courts in Texas?

Texas has six types of trial courts: justice of the peace courts, municipal courts, statutory probate courts, constitutional county courts, statutory county courts, and district courts. As all of these courts permit jury trials, you could be summoned to serve in any of these courts.

Justice of the peace and municipal courts are at the local or city level. Justice of the peace courts handle small claims, Class C (less serious) criminal misdemeanors, and magistrate functions. Municipal courts oversee fine-only criminal misdemeanors and municipal ordinance criminal cases.

County-level courts include the constitutional county courts, statutory county courts, and statutory probate courts. The constitutional county courts handle various cases, including civil actions between \$200 and \$10,000, juvenile matters, misdemeanors, and some probate. Statutory county courts also handle various cases, including civil cases up to \$200,000 and appellate actions from municipal or justice of the peace courts. Probate courts are limited primarily to probate matters.

The state district courts handle civil and criminal matters, though certain district courts may specialize in civil, criminal, juvenile, or family law cases.

I received a jury summons. What do I do now?

You may receive a summons if you are registered to vote or have a valid Texas driver's license or Texas personal identification card. Depending on which county you live in, you may receive a questionnaire prior to receiving your official summons. The questionnaire is to help determine your eligibility.

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You may be asked to either mail the questionnaire or bring it with you when you report for jury duty.

Can I go online to answer my jury summons?

Some counties do allow you to respond to your summons via the Internet. Information to that effect should be included with your summons.

How are juries selected?

Receiving a jury summons does not automatically mean you will serve on a jury. If you are summoned, you will become part of the jury pool — a large group of prospective jurors. From this group, you will be assigned to a jury panel and will be questioned by the lawyers for both sides. This is called “voir dire” or “to speak the truth.” After voir dire, if you are picked to serve, you will be placed on a jury.

How much time off from work will I miss if I am selected?

It depends. The jury selection process can take only a few hours up to a full day. If you do get selected, a trial can last from a few days to several months, but, in most cases, you can expect a trial to last about one week.

Does my employer have to pay me while I’m serving jury duty?

No, your employer is not required to pay you for the days you serve on a jury. However, your employer cannot fire you while you are serving.

What kind of compensation do I get for serving on a jury?

You will be paid by the county an amount not less than \$6.00 and not more than \$50.00 per day or fraction of a day served.

What if I have an emergency or special need after I have been selected?

Tell the bailiff of the court if you have an emergency or special need arise.

How is the jury foreman chosen?

You and your fellow jurors will select the man or woman to serve as foreman.

Is it okay to discuss the case after the trial is over?

After you are discharged from jury service, you are no longer bound by the obligation of secrecy. You are then free to discuss the case, if you wish.