Court and Community

Information and Instructions for Responding to Your Juror Summons

A Message From the Chief Justice of California, Tani Cantil-Sakauye

When I speak with jurors, they sometimes ask whether I have ever been called for jury service. The answer is yes, many times. I've been summoned for service and served as a juror while working as an attorney, as a trial court judge, and as an appellate justice. Even Chief Justices are called to serve, and we do.

Jury service is the responsibility of all qualified citizens, but it also is an opportunity for us to participate directly in our system of justice and contribute to our communities. Trial by jury is one of the fundamental ideals of American democracy; serving as jurors reminds us that these ideals exist only as long as individual citizens are willing to uphold them.

Still, no matter how worthwhile, jury service makes demands on our time, and our courts continue to make improvements to jury service to make it as convenient and manageable as possible.

Whether this is your first time being summoned or you are an experienced juror, you may have questions about jury service; this booklet answers some of the most commonly asked questions. Please check your summons for detailed instructions on service in your local court or visit your local court's website. You can find general information about jury service as well as links to your local court site at the California Courts Jury Information Resource Center at www.courts.ca.gov/jury.

If you are selected to serve, my hope is that you will find your service to be interesting and rewarding, as most jurors do.

Thank you for your service.

Respectfully,

T. Cantil-Sakauye

Hon. Tani Cantil-Sakauye
Chief Justice of California

Requirements for Jury Duty

You do not need any special skills or legal knowledge to be a juror. All you need is an open mind and a readiness to work with the other jurors to make decisions. You also need to be impartial—in other words, your decisions must not be influenced by personal feelings and biases.

Juror Information

Length of Service—One Day or One Trial

California's one-day or one-trial system means that a juror generally serves for one day or the duration of a trial. Typically, if you are not chosen for jury selection after one day at the courthouse, then your service is done for at least one year. If you are selected to serve on a jury, after the trial is over, your service is also completed for at least one year. Most people who report for jury service serve just one day, and most people who serve find the experience to be fascinating and rewarding.

Juror Pay

California pays jurors $15 every day starting on the second day of service, except employees of governmental entities who receive full pay and benefits from their employers while on jury service. All jurors receive at least 34 cents for each mile they travel to court. The mileage payment is for one-way travel and starts on the second day. Some courts pay you what it costs to use mass transit instead. Ask your local jury office for information about your court's payment process.

Transportation

Free parking for jurors is available at some courthouse locations, but it is often scarce at other locations, and some courts cannot offer parking at all because of facility constraints. Some courts also offer free public transit service. Check your summons or visit the court's website for more information about transportation options and directions to the courthouse.

Assembly Rooms

Most courts have jury assembly rooms where jurors can relax, read, work, access the Internet, or watch TV. Some courts even offer wireless Internet access for jurors with laptops and PDAs. Some assembly rooms offer coffee, vending machines, and cafés where jurors can purchase food and snacks.

Courtroom Requirements

Although comfortable clothing is suggested, make sure that it is appropriate given the importance and dignity

of the court proceedings. Shorts, tank tops, bare midriffs, or similar dress are not allowed. Electronic devices (laptop computers, cellular phones, etc.) are usually permitted in juror waiting areas; however, they are not permitted in the courtroom. Please turn off all electronic devices before entering the courtroom. In some courtrooms, electronic devices may not be allowed even if shut off. Check with your local court for specific requirements.

Emergencies

In an emergency, the judge can excuse you at any time during the trial and an alternate can take your place, even during deliberations. Of course, the emergency must be significant. The judge will make the final decision. If there is an emergency at home, you can also be contacted at the courthouse.

Security

You may be required to enter the courthouse through an airport-style metal detector. Please allow sufficient time for the security process, as there may be a line when entering the courthouse. Your personal belongings will be x-rayed. Objects like knitting needles, scissors, nail clippers, pocketknives, and weapons are not allowed. If you have forbidden items, you may be asked to leave the courthouse and return without them. Security officers might keep items they think are hazardous. These may or may not be returned to you when you leave the courthouse. Alcoholic beverages are also not allowed.

Trial Process

As a juror, you will listen to opening statements and closing arguments from both sides of the case. You will learn about and weigh the evidence the lawyers will present during the trial. Jurors also decide if witnesses are believable. At the end, you will be asked to make a decision about the case after you have talked it over with the other jurors. You may speak to the other jurors about the case only during deliberations. And you may not speak to anyone else about the case until it is over.

During the trial, the judge is the court's presiding officer and the final authority on the law. The lawyers act as advocates for their sides of the case. As a juror, you must be impartial. You are responsible for evaluating the facts and for applying the law to those facts. The

law is explained in the judge's instructions. All of these combined efforts preserve fairness and justice in our state and nation.

Qualifications to Be a Juror

California law says you are qualified to be a juror if you:

- Are a U.S. citizen
- Are at least 18 years old
- Can understand English enough to understand and discuss the case
- Are a resident of the county summoning you
- Have not served on a jury in the last 12 months
- Are not currently serving on a jury
- Are not under a conservatorship
- Have had your civil rights restored if you were convicted of a malfeasance or felony

No one is exempt because of his or her job, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, or economic status. If you are qualified, please follow the directions on your summons and call in or report as instructed. You will receive additional information when you report for service.

Postponement

Sometimes business or personal matters make it impossible to serve on the date shown on your summons. In that case you may ask to postpone your jury service. Follow the directions on your summons to request a postponement. Give the earliest date you will be able to serve.

Based on Age

You must be at least 18 years old to serve. You may be excused if you are over 70 and have a serious health problem. Follow the directions on the summons or contact the court for help.

Based on Health

If you are sick or disabled, you may postpone your service or request an excuse. Follow the directions on the summons for postponement or excuse. If you want an excuse, a doctor's note may be required.

Based on Hardship

If you face an undue hardship, you may request to be excused from jury service or to postpone your service.

Reasons you may be excused from jury service include:

- You have a physical or mental impairment.
- Serving would be an extreme financial burden.
- You care full-time for another person.

If you are eligible for an excuse, please use the response form on your summons to notify the court. Return it to the court immediately. You may also be required to come to court to speak with the judge or staff.

Failure to Appear

If you are qualified and you have not been excused or had your service postponed, you must report for jury service. Any person who fails to respond may be fined up to $1,500 and be subject to further penalties at the discretion of the judge. Carefully follow the instructions on the summons and contact the court if you need help.

Notify Your Employer

It is a violation of the California Labor Code to fire or harass an employee who is summoned to serve as a juror. School employees and students are protected as well by law. Your employer should be notified about your jury service as soon as you receive a summons. Please contact the court if you have a problem with your employer because of jury service.

Frequently Asked Questions

I'm busy. Why should I serve?

All persons accused of a crime or involved in a civil dispute have a constitutional right to have a jury decide their cases. When you serve on a jury, you make important decisions affecting people's lives and issues that concern your community.

What kinds of trials will I hear?

Two types of trials have juries: criminal trials and civil trials.

Why do I always get summoned but other people don't?

Selection is random. If you have already responded to a summons or have already served in the past 12 months, contact your local jury office and explain that you have been summoned twice in 12 months. It is important to contact the court to resolve the problem.

How did you get my name?

Courts use lists from the Department of Motor Vehicles and voter registration to select all prospective jurors randomly.

What if I do not speak English?

You do not need to speak perfect English to serve as a juror. The work done by the courts affects all people, so it is important that all communities be a part of our justice system. If you cannot understand English, follow the instructions on the summons or contact the jury office. If you need assistance, a friend or a family member who speaks English can call for you. However, you may still have to come in person to request a disqualification.

How long does a trial take?

Trial length depends on how complex the issues are and how long jurors spend in deliberations. Most trials are completed within a week. The judge knows about how long the trial will take, and he or she will give you an idea when your group is called for jury selection. Judges are aware that long trials can be difficult. Let the judge know if it is a serious hardship for you to serve on a long trial. Please be patient during this process, because a lot of people have similar concerns about time.

What if I care for a child or an adult?

If you have a child or an adult under your care, you may ask for a postponement or excuse from jury service. Read your summons carefully or contact your local jury office. If you are a mother who is breastfeeding a child, you may request a postponement for up to one year by filling out the summons response form.

Why do jurors seem to wait around so much?

The judge and court staff work to reduce the time prospective jurors spend waiting for assignment. We ask for your patience and suggest that you bring a book or other reading material to occupy your time while waiting. The judge and court staff will explain delays when possible.

Jurors: Serving Justice, Serving the Community.

Additional Information

Please contact your court if you have specific questions about your juror summons or your ability to appear for service. Contact information for the court is located on the juror summons. More information is also available on the Internet using the web address that is also on the juror summons.

Persons With Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made to allow you to serve, including but not limited to wheelchair access, readers, assistive listening devices, sign language interpreters, or real-time captioning. Please call the phone number on your summons as soon as possible to allow the court time to provide the accommodation.

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