

JUROR GUIDE

How was I selected for jury duty?

Jurors are randomly selected by a computer from a combined list of voter and driver registration records.

What do I do when the summons and the questionnaire arrive?

Jurors should make note of the scheduled day to appear and fill out the Confidential Juror Questionnaire and return it in the provided envelope to the Jury Commissioner's Office.

Who is eligible to serve?

Anyone 18 years of age or older who is a United States citizen and resident of Fayette County and who has not been convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than one year and has not been granted a pardon or amnesty.

Will I be paid for serving as a juror?

Yes, \$9 per day for the first three days (including jury selection) and \$25 per day thereafter, plus 17 cents a mile for transportation to and from the courthouse. These fees are set by the state legislature.

What if my employer doesn't allow me to serve?

The law prohibits any employer from preventing an employee to serve as a juror. The law also prohibits an employer from depriving a juror benefits because of jury service, such as requiring you to use vacation time to serve.

Is my employer required to pay me while I serve as a juror?

If you work for the government, your employer must pay you. If you work in the private sector, employers are not required by law to compensate you while serving on jury duty. Please check to see if your employer has a policy regarding juror compensation.

Can I be excused from jury duty?

Jurors who need to be excused from their jury duty must request an excusal by sending or faxing a letter to the Administrative Office of Fayette County Courts, Fayette County Courthouse, 61 E. Main Street, Uniontown, PA 15401 or by facsimile 724-430-1001.

A Physician's letter must accompany excusal from jury duty for medical reasons.

Pennsylvania law allows for the exemption from jury duty for: (1) persons in the active military service, and (2) persons who demonstrate undue hardship or extreme inconvenience. There is no exemption for age. Other reasons for excusal are reviewed and evaluated pursuant to court policy.

Jurors failing to report for jury duty and have not been excused from service are accountable to the Court and are subject to arrest and prosecution.

Is it possible to appear for jury service and not sit on a jury?

Yes. More people are called than actually serve because it is not always possible to estimate accurately the number of jurors who will be needed to serve.

What kinds of cases will I hear as a juror?

Jurors hear either criminal or civil cases. In criminal cases, a District Attorney or Attorney General, referred to as the prosecutor, acting on behalf of the citizens of Pennsylvania prosecutes a case against an individual or an entity accused of a crime. The person or entity accused of the crime is referred to as the defendant. In civil cases, an individual, entity or governmental agency brings a suit against another individual, entity or governmental agency. The party initiating the lawsuit is referred to as the plaintiff, and the party defending the suit is the defendant.

How long will I serve?

Criminal trials are usually scheduled during the first full week of the month. In some instances, you may serve on more than one case during the week. Civil trials generally do not last longer than three to four days, however, some trials last longer.

May I go home at the end of the day?

Jurors almost always go home at the end of the day. If a jury is sequestered (a term used to describe jurors who are housed during the trial at the expense of the county), the jurors will be advised of this during the selection process. Sequestration rarely occurs.

Are accommodations available if I have a disability?

If you are disabled and require a reasonable accommodation to gain access to the Court and its services, please contact the Administrative Office of Fayette County Courts at (724) 430-1230 at least 72 hours prior to appearance. We are unable to provide transportation.

Where do I park?

If you are not familiar with the location of the Courthouse, get directions in advance to avoid being late. Allow enough time to find a parking space. Parking is available in a lot on Penn Street, in a parking garage on South Street and across the street from the Courthouse. Public metered parking is available near the Courthouse but please remember that jurors who are ticketed for failure to pay parking meters are responsible for reporting to City Hall to pay the parking fine. The Court will not pay the fine for you. Handicapped parking is available upon request.

How often do I have to serve as a juror?

There is no limit on the number of times your name may be drawn for service. In Pennsylvania, anyone who has served on a trial as a juror fewer than three days does not need to serve again for one year. Anyone who has served three or more days does not have to serve again for three years.

What will I do on the scheduled day to appear?

Jurors are to report at 8:30 AM to Courtroom No. 1, Second Floor, Fayette County Courthouse, 61 E. Main Street, Uniontown, PA.

You are required to bring with you your summons and photo identification in order to receive your jury badge. The jury badge is to be worn outside of your clothing at chest height. You will be required to wear your badge at all times when you are in the Courthouse.

Roll call will be taken by the Clerk of Courts and you will remain for further instruction by the Court.

You may spend some time waiting to be selected as a juror. Such time is not wasted. Your mere presence as a prospective juror in a case may help the Court in settling the case, thus avoiding the need of what might have been a long and costly trial. The lawyers know you are prepared to sit in judgment of the evidence to be presented and render a verdict. The moments just before trial are often the best for the settlement of a case. In a great many instances, the lawyers will retire with the judge to his chambers. There, they will resolve certain factual or procedural matters that have prevented them from agreeing upon a settlement, with the result that a compromise is reached or a guilty plea entered and no trial is required.

There are morning, afternoon and lunch breaks. Vending machines are located on the lower level of the Courthouse in addition there are several nearby restaurants.

What is the role of a juror?

- Listen carefully to all evidence presented during trial.
- During deliberations, discuss the evidence with fellow jurors and decide what the facts are based upon which witnesses and evidence you believe.
- Apply the law, as explained by the judge, to the facts, as determined.
- Do no independent research or investigation.
- Determine the money damages.
- In criminal cases, decide whether the defendant is guilty or not guilty.
- Arrive at a verdict.

What is the role of the judge?

- Make sure all parties have a fair opportunity to present their side.
- Make sure the trial process proceeds in a proper manner.
- Instruct the jury on the applicable law

What is Voir Dire?

Voir Dire is a French term that refers to the preliminary examination of an individual's qualifications to be a juror. Voir Dire is sometimes conducted by the judge and sometimes by the lawyers. The purpose is to find out whether any views held by the potential juror hinder his or her ability to act impartially. Therefore, it is very important to answer honestly.

What is the trial process?

- The jury is selected by the attorneys for both parties.
- The jury is sworn in.
- The jury receives opening instructions by the trial judge.
- Opening Statements are presented by the attorneys.
- Evidence is presented.
- Closing Arguments are conducted by attorneys for each party.
- The Trial Judge charges or instructs the jury on the applicable law.
- The jury deliberates.
- The jury reaches and renders its verdict.
- The jury is dismissed by the judge.

What is the deliberation process?

The judge explains the law and provides guidance on procedures to be followed in jury deliberations. One of the first things the jury does during deliberations is to choose a foreperson. The foreperson should make sure each juror has a chance to speak; each juror's opinion is treated with respect; the jury does not rush to verdict; jurors carefully listen to one another; and they return a fair and impartial verdict based upon the facts of the case.

In criminal cases, a unanimous jury is required to find the defendant guilty. In civil cases, 10/12 of the jurors must be in agreement to return a verdict.

What happens after the jury reaches a verdict?

Once a jury reaches a verdict, the foreperson informs the Court that the jury has reached a verdict and everyone returns to the courtroom. The verdict will then be announced. After the verdict is announced and recorded, the jury has completed its duties and is discharged.

After being discharged, jurors are permitted, but not required, to talk about the case. Jurors are not permitted, however, to disclose what another juror said in the jury room. If anyone attempts to communicate with a juror regarding his or her role as a juror in any way that one feels is improper the juror should report the incident to the court as soon as possible.

Some facts to know

Proper attire or dress is required for Court. As a suggestion, you should dress comfortably and in an appropriate manner. Shorts, t-shirts, tank tops and sports clothing are never considered appropriate dress.

No food or beverages are permitted in any courtroom.

Cell phones must be turned off while in the courtroom.

No one is permitted to move about in the courtroom when an oath is being administered.

Your comfort and convenience are important and court personnel are interested in serving you. The clerks, tip staves and other court aides will gladly help you in any way they can. Always feel free to ask for help.

The Courthouse has a "no smoking" policy.

The Courthouse has a "no weapons" policy and all jurors are required to go through a metal detector.

Conclusion

While jury service may sometimes be inconvenient, it is an extremely important civic duty that emphasizes the critical role you serve in our justice system. **Without citizens willing to serve as jurors, our system of justice would not exist.** Many jurors find the experience to be educational and rewarding – an experience you will never forget.