

Jury Commissioners' Office
61 E Main Street Uniontown, PA 15401
724-430-1279 (office)/ 724-430-2047 (fax)

JUROR GUIDE

How was I selected for jury duty?

Jurors are randomly selected by a computer from a combined list of names and addresses of voter registration records and the Department of Public Welfare, Transportation and Revenue records.

What do I do when the summons and the two questionnaires arrive?

Jurors should make note of the scheduled day to appear and fill out both the Qualifying and Confidential Questionnaires. If your name or address is incorrect, please correct them on the Qualifying Questionnaire in the box across from your name and address. Then return both questionnaires in the Jury Commissioners' postage paid self-addressed envelope that was provided to you in your packet.

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, \$9.00 per day for the first three days (including jury selection) and \$25.00 per day thereafter, plus \$.17 a mile for transportation to and from the courthouse. These fees are set by the state legislature. If requested, at the conclusion of your service you will receive a letter for your employer from the Administrative Office of Fayette County Courts detailing your days of service and amount paid. A check will be mailed to you after you have completed your service and hand in your badge.

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 any 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/postponed from their jury duty must request an excusal/postponement by completing the Qualifying Questionnaire, then turning it over on the back (which is blank) and by writing your excusal/postponement request on that paper. Also complete the enclosed Confidential Questionnaire and return them both in the Jury Commissioners' postage paid self-addressed envelope that was provided to you in your packet. Or you may fax your information to 724-430-2047, with your name and badge number on it. A juror has not been excused from service until the Jury Commissioner's Office has notified the juror either by phone or mail. The Jury Commissioners can be reached at (724) 430-1279.

A Physician's letter must accompany a request for excusal/postponement from jury duty for medical reasons with the juror's name and badge number on it.

Each jurisdiction retains the authority to grant or reject requests for postponement or excuse from service, but by law only those involved in active service in the armed forces of the United States or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, families (spouses, children, siblings, parents, grandparents and grandchildren) of criminal homicide victims and those persons demonstrating undue hardship caused by jury service will be excused.

Jurors who fail to report to court when instructed to do so may be served by the Fayette County Sheriff's Office with an order to show cause of why they should not be held in contempt of court for not appearing as instructed. Upon a finding of contempt, the Court could impose fines and other penalties.

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, civil cases or coroner's inquest. In criminal cases, a District Attorney or Attorney General, referred to as the prosecutor, acting on behalf of the citizens or Pennsylvania prosecutes a case against an individual or an entity accused of a crime. The persons or entity accused of the crime is referred to as the defendant. In the 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. In the coroner's inquest, the jury decides if the case can be settled or held over for court.

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** are generally the third week of the months of January, April, July, and October. Cases do not last longer than three or four days, however, some trials last longer. The summons may read, a week in a certain month and then ending in another month. It doesn't mean you have to serve that long. You may come on a selected trial day you could get picked to serve that day or a day in between the two months. **Coroner's Inquests** are scheduled by the Coroner when a case presents itself.

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 garages are located at the corner of Gallatin Ave. and Peter St. (across from City Hall) Cost: \$6.00. Also on Church Street and Beeson Ave, cost: \$6.00. And a small parking lot is located on Main Street (across from 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. **Please do not park in local city business lots as your car may be towed. You may also contact Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation (FACT) at (724) 628-7433 for transportation schedules.**

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 A.M. to Courtroom #1, Second Floor, Fayette County Courthouse, 61 E. Main Street, Uniontown, PA 15401.

You are required to bring with you your summons and/or if you didn't return your questionnaires and photo identification in order to receive your jury badge. The Jury Commissioners will be handing out badges, and at that time, you may return your questionnaires if you didn't send them in. The 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 Administrative Office of Fayette County 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 cases in the morning, afternoon, and lunch breaks. Vending machines are located in the basement level of the Courthouse and 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 on 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 verdicts.
- 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. Short, T-shirts, tank or halter tops and sports clothing are never considered appropriate dress.

The Court cannot be responsible for personal belongings, so please bring only what you need.

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 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 WEAPON" policy and all jurors are required to go through a metal detector.

CONCLUSION

To ensure their rights, the people themselves must be willing to play a role in the justice system.

Trial by jury is a right guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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.