

# GUIDE TO JURY SERVICE

The United States Constitution and the Texas Constitution guarantee all people, regardless of race, religion, sex, national origin, or economic status, the right to trial by an impartial jury. Our system of justice, both civil and criminal, is founded on the idea that people whose rights are at stake should be able to present their case to a jury of their peers. The right to a jury trial is fundamental to safeguarding each American's civil liberties and administering justice.

Jury service is a privilege that offers the average citizen an unequalled opportunity to influence and deliberate over fundamental matters of justice. The jury system has proven to be the fairest method for resolving civil disputes, and for determining guilt or innocence in criminal cases. By performing this important civic duty, jurors help ensure fairness and excellence in the administration of justice by federal and state courts.

## **Jury Summons**

### ***Why did I receive a summons?***

The process for selecting prospective jurors is mandated by state law. Each county receives from the Secretary of State a list of potential jurors. Potential jurors are those individuals in the county that are registered to vote and hold either a Texas driver's license or a Texas identification card. Citizens on the list are randomly selected and mailed a summons to report for jury service.

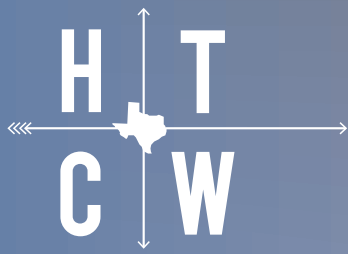
### ***What to do if you get a summons?***

Some counties choose to mail a questionnaire to prospective jurors to determine their eligibility prior to mailing the official jury summons; other counties mail the questionnaire and the jury summons together.

Return the completed questionnaire to the court by mail, or bring the completed questionnaire with you when you report for jury duty. If your county participates in "I-Jury Online Impaneling" and you have access to the internet, you may respond to your summons online and submit any scheduling conflict without making a trip to the courthouse. Simply follow the "I-Jury" information enclosed with the juror summons you received.

If any of the exemptions listed below apply to you, complete the form on the back of the jury summons and mail it back to your county's Jury Administrator's Office referenced on the summons. For scheduling conflicts, medical exemptions, the permanent exemption for being over the age of 70, and any other questions you have about your summons or your jury duty obligation, call your county's Jury Administrator's Office.

Failure to answer the summons as directed by the summons is subject to contempt action that is punishable by a fine not less than \$100 nor more than \$1000.



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## **Are you able to serve?**

### ***Qualifications for Jury Service***

Under the law, all citizens must report to jury duty as instructed by their jury summons.

To be qualified to serve as a juror you must:

- be at least 18 years old;
- be a U.S. citizen;
- be a Texas resident and reside in the county in which you are to serve as juror;
- be qualified under the Constitution and laws to vote in the county in which you are to serve as a juror (Note: you do not have to be registered to vote to be qualified to vote);
- be of sound mind and good moral character;
- be able to read, write and communicate in English;
- not have served as juror for six days during the preceding three months in the county court or during the preceding six months in the district court; and
- not be convicted or, or be under indictment or other legal accusation for, misdemeanor theft or a felony.

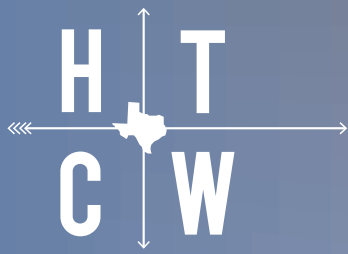
\*Note that the completion of deferred adjudication is not a disqualifying “conviction”.

### **Exemptions from Jury Service**

In general, if you are qualified for jury duty and are not excluded from service, you may, but are not required to ask to be excused from jury duty if you:

- are over 70 years of age (you may also request a permanent age 70 exemption);
- have legal custody of a child younger than 12 years of age and your service on the jury requires leaving the child without adequate supervision;
- are a student of a public or private secondary school;
- are a person enrolled and in actual attendance at an institution of higher education;
- are an officer or employee of the senate, house of representatives, or any department, commission, board, office or other agency in the legislative branch of government;
- have served as a petit juror in the county during the 24-month period preceding the date you are required to appear for the summons;
- are the primary caretaker of a person who is unable to care for himself or herself (this does not apply to health care workers);
- have been summoned for service in a county with a population of at least 250,000 and you have served as a petit juror in the county during the three-year period preceding the date you are to appear for jury service (this does not apply if the jury wheel has been reconstituted since your service as a petit juror; or
- are a member of the United States Military Forces service on active duty and deployed to a location away from your home station and out of your county of residence.

If you have an excuse that is not included on this list (i.e., physical or mental impairments, religious holidays, or individual personal hardships), you should explain your situation to the judge or the court administrator at the appropriate time. The court has the discretion to hear any reasonable sworn excuse of a prospective juror and either release the juror from jury service or reschedule the juror’s jury service for another day. However, the court may not excuse a juror for an economic reason unless each party of record is present and approves the release.



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## Tips for Jury Service

- Listen carefully and follow the instructions given by court personnel and the judge
- Know where you are supposed to report.
- Wear attire that is comfortable and shows respect for the court. You might also want to bring a sweater or light jacket.
- Take advantage of free parking offered to prospective jurors and avoid metered parking.
- Bring water and a snack.
- Bring something to read during periods of waiting.
- Be aware that you will be asked to turn off cell phones and pagers.
- Pay attention to the instructions given by the Judge.

## Other Resources & Links

- [www.americanjuror.org](http://www.americanjuror.org)
- <https://www.txcourts.gov/about-texas-courts/juror-information/jury-service-in-texas/>
- Sample County Court jury information website <https://jury.co.midland.tx.us/main.asp?id=faq>