

## Message from the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness

Congratulations! We welcome you to our nation and wish you much happiness and success as you exercise your new rights guaranteed to you by the Constitution.

Since the early days of our republic, jury service has remained a mark of citizenship and a touchstone of civic duty. One of the country's founding fathers, President Thomas Jefferson, referred to jury service as "the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution."

We hope that you will find this guide helpful when you are summoned to perform jury service - one of the most important and precious duties of citizenship in the United States of America.

## Looking for More Information on Jury Service?

For more information on jury service in federal courts in general, visit:

<https://www.uscourts.gov/services-forms/jury-service>

For more information on jury service in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, visit:

<https://www.pawd.uscourts.gov/jury-information>

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Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness

## Jury Service in Federal Courts for U.S. Citizens with Limited English



Prepared by the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness



## Jury Service FAQs

Jury service is one of the most important civic duties of a U.S. citizen. As a juror, you have the opportunity to participate directly in our justice system and give back to your community. The work performed by the courts affects everyone, so it is important that all people, including those who speak English as a second language, serve as jurors.

For some people, however, jury service may seem frightening, especially if they do not speak English very well. There is no reason to be afraid. Court staff will be there to assist you.

Here are answers to frequently-asked questions about jury service in federal courts for new U.S. citizens.

### WHAT DOES A JURY DO?

In the United States, citizens have the constitutional right to have a group of people from the community decide their court cases. This group is called a jury and it is chosen by the judge and lawyers on a case. During a trial or court hearing, a jury listens to the evidence presented by the lawyers and the directions of the judge. The jury uses the evidence and the judge's directions to make a decision about the case. In a criminal case, the jury decides whether a person committed a crime or not. In a civil case, the jury decides if a person or business is responsible for an injury or damage done to another person, business or property.

### WHO IS QUALIFIED TO SERVE ON A JURY IN FEDERAL COURT?

As a U.S. citizen, you are qualified to serve on a jury in federal court **if**:

- You are at least 18 years old;
- You live in the judicial district where the federal courthouse is located for at least one year;
- You are able to speak the English language or are able to read, write, and understand the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to fill out satisfactorily the juror qualification questionnaire form;
- You have no disqualifying mental or physical condition or illness;
- You are not currently subject to felony charges punishable by imprisonment for more than one year; and
- You have never been convicted of a felony (unless civil rights have been legally restored).

### ENGLISH IS MY SECOND LANGUAGE. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROFICIENT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

To serve on a jury in federal court, the law requires that you must be proficient in the English language. This means that you must be able to speak, read and write English well enough to satisfactorily complete the juror qualification questionnaire form. **You do not have to be a perfect English speaker to serve on a jury in federal court.**

### CAN I STILL SERVE ON A JURY IN FEDERAL COURT IF ENGLISH IS MY SECOND LANGUAGE?

**YES.** Remember, you do not have to speak English perfectly. You only need to be able to speak, write, and understand English well enough to fill out the juror questionnaire qualification form.

### HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM QUALIFIED TO SERVE ON A FEDERAL JURY?

When you are being considered for jury service, your federal district court will ask you to complete a juror qualification form. On this form, you will be asked general questions about yourself, including your ability to read, write and understand the English language. After answering the questions and submitting the form to your federal district court, court employees will review your answers and decide if you are qualified to serve on a federal jury. If you are qualified, your federal district court will send you a paper in the mail called a summons. The summons informs you that you are being considered for jury service. Read and follow all instructions on the summons.

### I RECEIVED A SUMMONS, BUT I HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT MY ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Contact your federal district court and express your concerns to them.

