



## The Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness

601 Commonwealth Ave, Suite 6200  
P.O. Box 62545  
Harrisburg, PA 17106-2545  
717.231.3300  
[pa-interbranchcommission.com](http://pa-interbranchcommission.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Interbranch Commission Shares Model Juror Mental Health Pamphlet with Judicial Districts Across Pennsylvania**

*The Pamphlet Aims to Reduce Barriers to Jury Service by Including Information on Juror Stress  
and Access to Local Mental Health Resources*

**Harrisburg, November 22, 2024** – On Wednesday, November 13, 2024, the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness (“Interbranch Commission”) distributed its newly published [pamphlet on juror mental health resources](#) to President Judges and District Court Administrators in each of Pennsylvania’s 60 judicial districts. The pamphlet is designed to equip jurors with resources that mitigate the mental health impact that serving on a jury poses for jurors and jurors’ families alike. Designed as a “plug and play” template, the pamphlet designates space for districts to insert their own county seal(s) and references to local mental health resources so that it can be easily modified for use in counties across the Commonwealth.

The right to a trial by jury is woven into the fabric of democratic civil society. As [observed](#) by the National Center for State Courts (“NCSC”), “Jury duty is the only civic responsibility that requires citizens to involuntarily step away from their jobs, their families and other personal obligations to serve the government.” Given the central role juries play in administering justice, the Interbranch Commission’s Jury Service Committee (“Committee”) has worked since its inception to reduce barriers to jury service by, among other things, supporting legislation that would increase juror compensation, provide free parking and public transit to jurors, and reduce the range of criminal

offenses that currently disqualify individuals from jury service for life. In February, the Interbranch Commission also helped to organize an [informational session](#) before the House Judiciary Committee on these and other issues related to jury service, including juror mental health.

As part of their service, jurors face disruptions to daily routine, restrictions on their behavior, potential exposure to gruesome evidence and contentious testimony, and the difficulty of jury deliberations and determining the culpability of another member of the community. As a result, serving on a jury foreseeably impacts jurors' mental health. In a recent NCSC [survey](#), 26% of jurors admitted to struggling with persistent negative emotions after completing jury duty, with nearly 50% reporting high levels of anxiety, guilt, shame, anger and fear that lasted for an average of two years post-service. As observed by NCSC in that same survey, one way to mitigate juror stress and the secondhand, or "vicarious," trauma they may experience is by providing jurors with written information on ways to reduce that stress.

### ***The Pamphlet***

Consistent with this observation, the Jury Service Committee reviewed resources currently available for jurors to consult post-trial. What the Committee discovered is that some, but not all, judicial districts distribute differing pamphlets to jurors after their trial service has ended. The Committee reviewed these existing pamphlets with an eye toward producing a standardized pamphlet that could be used across the Commonwealth. As part of this process, the Committee solicited feedback from mental health and legal practitioners to ensure that the content of the pamphlet is accurate, approachable, and accessible to a likely juror. The resulting resource is an adaptable pamphlet capable of use in each of Pennsylvania's 60 judicial districts.

The Interbranch Commission is hopeful that districts that do not currently provide a post-trial juror service pamphlet (or that are interested in updating their existing form) will modify our pamphlet for local use. "The Commission will continue to make legislative recommendations to improve the

selection process for, public participation on, and the diversity of juries across the Commonwealth. However, because the General Assembly did not introduce legislation following the hearing on jury service issues in February, the Commission has pursued alternative means, such as producing this pamphlet, to advance its goal of improving the jury service experience. Implementing this resource is an immediate step judicial districts across Pennsylvania can take to support jurors. The Interbranch Commission stands ready to help every district modify and finalize this pamphlet at no cost,” said Executive Director, Maraleen Shields.

### ***Historical Context***

The Interbranch Commission, alongside many other stakeholders, has diligently worked to improve access to jury service for all Pennsylvanians for approximately two decades. In addition to its current efforts, the Interbranch Commission played a key role in the drafting and passage of [Act 37](#) (2007), which created a more diverse juror pool by establishing a Statewide Juror List comprised of individuals identified by four state agencies: PennDOT, and the Departments of Revenue, State, and Human Services. The Interbranch Commission also produced and has widely distributed its guide, [Best Practices for Jury Selection and Service in Pennsylvania](#), to inform judges, court administrators, and attorneys of model practices to improve their districts’ jury service and selection procedures. In October, the Interbranch Commission produced a resource guide containing research on and recommendations related to juror mental health that was shared with all participants in the Pennsylvania Courts’ first statewide [Behavioral Health Summit](#) in Hershey.

###

The Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness was established in 2005 by the three branches of Pennsylvania government. The purpose of the Interbranch Commission is to promote equal application of the law. The Interbranch Commission fulfills its purpose by implementing the recommendations from a 2003 study by the Supreme Court Committee on Racial

and Gender Bias in the Justice System (“Committee”); investigating and implementing new initiatives that may not have been addressed by the Committee; suggesting ways to reduce bias in all three branches of Pennsylvania government; raising both public and professional awareness of its work; and increasing public confidence in Pennsylvania government. The Interbranch Commission presently conducts its work through six Committees: Criminal Justice, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Victims/Survivors, Equal Opportunity and Diversity, Jury Service, Language Access, and LGBTQ+ Rights.

**For more information, press only:**

Executive Director, Maraleen D. Shields, Esquire  
717-231-3300 ext. 4138  
[Maraleen.shields@pacourts.us](mailto:Maraleen.shields@pacourts.us)

**For more information on the Interbranch Commission:**

<https://pa-interbranchcommission.com/>