



## 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, ext. 4138  
[pa-interbranchcommission.com](http://pa-interbranchcommission.com)

Via Email Only

Re: Juror Mental Health

Dear President Judges:

The Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness (“[Interbranch Commission](http://pa-interbranchcommission.com)”) was established in 2005 by all three branches of Pennsylvania government. The Interbranch Commission fulfills its purpose by, among other things, 1) implementing the recommendations from the 2003 study by the Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System (“Committee”), 2) investigating and implementing new initiatives that may not have been addressed by the Committee, 3) raising both public and professional awareness of its work, and 4) increasing public confidence in all three branches of government. We pride ourselves on being a non-partisan, evidenced-based organization.

The Interbranch Commission consists of 24 volunteer appointees (“Commissioners”). Appointments are divided between the Supreme Court (8), the Governor (8), the President Pro Tempore of the Senate (2), the Speaker of the House of Representatives (2), the Minority Leader of the Senate (2), and the Minority Leader of the House (2). The Interbranch Commission’s work is principally conducted through six committees, including a Jury Service Committee, that meet on a bimonthly basis. Our staff consists of a staff attorney and executive director.

The Interbranch Commission’s Jury Service Committee, which is chaired by Catherine Law, Esquire, Chief Deputy Public Defender in York County, has been advocating for improved juror services since its inception.<sup>1</sup> Earlier this year, the Interbranch Commission helped organize an informational session before the House Judiciary Committee<sup>2</sup> on jury service issues such as **jury compensation**, **juror mental health**, and **jury composition**. While no legislation was introduced this legislative session,

---

<sup>1</sup> At the request of then Chief Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Ralph J. Cappy, the Interbranch Commission has continued to identify best practices in Pennsylvania and nationally and to make recommendations to improve the selection process for, public participation on, and the diversity of juries across the Commonwealth. On September 12, 2007, the Interbranch Commission submitted *Suggested Standardized Procedures for Jury Selection in Pennsylvania*. More recently, the Interbranch Commission revisited this work and produced [Best Practices for Jury Selection and Service in Pennsylvania](#).

<sup>2</sup> Informational Hearing on Jury Service Issues: Hearing Before the Pa. House Judiciary Comm., 2023-24 Regular Session (Feb. 1, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCTd7KYc5qs>.

the Jury Service Committee has continued the advance its purpose to improve the jury service experience.

The right to a jury trial is woven into the fabric of our court system. As observed by the National Center for State Courts, “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.”<sup>3</sup> Jury duty has an impact on those called to serve as well as the families of those who serve. In recent surveys, 26% of jurors admitted to struggling with persistent negative emotions after completing jury duty, and 50% of jurors reported high levels of anxiety as well as guilt, shame, anger, and fear that persist for an average of two years post jury service.<sup>4</sup> One recommendation, outlined in *Citizens on Call: Responding to the Needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jurors*, is to mitigate vicarious trauma caused by jury service by providing jurors with written information about potential juror stress. **This is an immediate step we can take across the Commonwealth to support jurors.**

Interbranch Commission’s Jury Service Committee resolved to look at what resources are currently available for jurors to consult post-trial. What we discovered is that some, but not all, judicial districts distribute different pamphlets to jurors after their trial service has ended. We then reviewed existing pamphlets from five judicial districts<sup>5</sup> with an eye toward producing a pamphlet that could be used across the Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup> As part of this process, we solicited feedback from mental health and legal practitioners to ensure the content of our pamphlet is accurate, approachable, and accessible to a likely juror. The resulting resource (enclosed) is a “plug and play” model pamphlet that can be easily modified for use in all sixty judicial districts, including each district’s county seal(s) and references to local mental health resources.

If your judicial district is already providing a post-trial juror service pamphlet, we welcome you to compare it to our model. Feel free to adopt none, some, or all of the content from our pamphlet. If your judicial district is not providing a post-trial juror service pamphlet, we urge you to consider adopting and modifying this pamphlet for use in your judicial district. The Interbranch Commission staff stands ready to help every judicial district finalize this pamphlet at no cost.

---

<sup>3</sup> Nat’l Ctr. for St. Cts., *Citizens on Call: Responding to the Needs of 21st Century Jurors* 1, 4 (Dec. 2023), [https://cosca.ncsc.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/97251/COSCA-Citizens-on-Call.pdf](https://cosca.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/97251/COSCA-Citizens-on-Call.pdf).

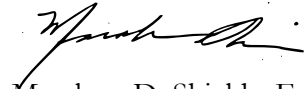
<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 27.

<sup>5</sup> We obtained existing pamphlets from Franklin/Fulton, Chester, Lancaster, Lehigh, and Philadelphia Counties.

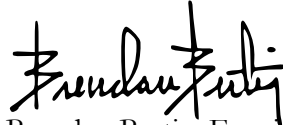
<sup>6</sup> We owe a debt of gratitude to Cori Seilhamer, Mental Health Program Specialist at Franklin/Fulton County Mental Health, Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities and Early Intervention, Patrick Martin, Jury Commissioner for the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, Jennifer Mulroney, Assistant District Court Administrator – Criminal of Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas, Kim Silvestri, Victim/Witness Coordinator of Lehigh County, Margaret Murphy, Executive Director of NAMI Lehigh Valley, Yamelisa Taveras of Counseling Solutions Lehigh Valley, Kimberly Makoul, Esquire, Chief Public Defender of Lehigh County, and Gavin Holihan, Esquire, District Attorney of Lehigh County for supporting and providing invaluable feedback on this important project.

We thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this important matter and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,



Maraleen D. Shields, Esquire  
Executive Director



Brendan Bertig, Esquire  
Staff Attorney

Encl.

cc: Leonard Rivera, Esquire, Chair of Interbranch Commission  
Catherine Law, Esquire, Chair Jury Service Committee  
Interbranch Commissioners