

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

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that over 1.3 million Pennsylvania residents, or 10.8% of the state's population, speak a language other than English. Having the voices of all Pennsylvanians fairly represented in our courts is an important goal of our Commission. One way to ensure fair representation in our courts is to encourage those who speak English as a second language to serve on juries.

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 Pennsylvania's state courts in general, visit:

<https://www.pacourts.us/learn/jury-duty>

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

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## Jury Service in Pennsylvania's State Courts for U.S. Citizens Who Speak English as a Second Language



*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. The judges and attorneys will explain the jury trial process and answer any of your questions.

Here are answers to frequently-asked questions about serving on a jury in Pennsylvania's state courts, particularly for people for whom English is their second language.

## WHAT DOES A JURY DO?

In the U.S., citizens have the constitutional right to have a group of community members 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, and uses both to make a decision about the case. In a criminal case, the jury decides whether a person is guilty or not. In a civil case, the jury decides if a party is responsible for an injury or damage to another person, business or property, and decides the amount of money, if any, to be paid to the party.

## WHO IS QUALIFIED TO SERVE ON A JURY?

You are qualified to serve on a jury in Pennsylvania's state courts **if**:

- You are at least 18 years old;
- You are a citizen of Pennsylvania;
- You live in the county of the judicial district that summoned you for jury service;
- You are able to speak, read, write, and understand the English language;
- You have no disqualifying mental or physical condition or illness; and
- You have never been convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than one year (unless you have received a pardon or amnesty for committing the crime).

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

When you are being considered for jury service, your judicial district will send you a paper called a summons. Read and follow all instructions on the summons.

Your judicial district will also ask you to complete a juror questionnaire form. On this form, you will be asked general questions about yourself, including your ability to read, write and understand the English language. This form will be used by court staff, judges, and lawyers to determine if you are qualified to serve on a jury. Follow the instructions to complete and submit the form to your judicial district.

## ENGLISH IS MY SECOND LANGUAGE. CAN I STILL SERVE ON A JURY?

**Yes.** To serve on a jury in Pennsylvania's state courts, 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 understand the evidence presented and the judge's instructions in a case. **You do not have to be a perfect English speaker to serve on a jury.**

## THE JUROR QUESTIONNAIRE FORM ASKS IF I CAN READ, WRITE AND SPEAK ENGLISH. HOW SHOULD I ANSWER THIS QUESTION?

If you can speak English, and can read and understand the questions on the juror questionnaire, it is likely that you know enough English to answer "yes" to this question.

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

Contact your judicial district's court administration office and express your concerns to them.

