



# Texas Uniform Jury Handbook

## As Authorized by Chapter 23 of the Government Code

### Why Is Jury Service Important?

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. Justice ultimately depends to a large measure upon the quality of the jurors who serve in our courts.

### What Is My Duty As a Juror?

As a juror, you must be fair and impartial. Your actions and decisions must be free of any bias or prejudice. Your actions and decisions are the foundation of our judicial system.

### How Was I Selected?

You were selected at random from a list of voter registrations and a list of driver registrations from the county in which you live.

### Am I Eligible?

*Jurors must:*

- Be a citizen of the United States and of this State.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Reside in the county of jury service.
- Be able to read, write and communicate in English.
- Be of sound mind.

*You cannot serve on a jury if:*

- You have been convicted of a felony or of any type of theft (unless rights have been restored);
- You are now on probation or deferred adjudication for a felony or for any type of theft; or
- You are now under indictment for a felony or are now under criminal charges for any type of theft.



If you are in doubt, or think you may not be qualified to serve on a jury for one of the above or any other reasons, please notify the clerk or bailiff.

### Who Can Be Excused From Jury Service?

You are entitled to be excused as a juror if you:

- Are over 70 years of age;
- Have custody of a child younger than 12, who would be left without adequate supervision if the person was required to serve on a jury.
- Are a student in class;
- Are a member of the United States military forces serving on active duty and deployed to a location away from your home station and out of your county of residence;
- Are the caretaker of a person who is unable to care for themselves (an invalid); or
- Can show a physical or mental impairment or an inability to comprehend or to communicate in English.

### What Are the Different Types of Cases?

There are two basic types of cases, criminal and civil (including family cases).

#### Criminal Cases

A criminal case results when a person is accused of committing a crime. You, as a juror, must decide whether the person charged is guilty or not guilty. The accused person is presumed innocent, and the State, represented by the District or County Attorney, must prove guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt."

#### Civil Cases

A civil case results from a disagreement or dispute between two or more parties. In a civil case, you, as a juror, must answer questions of disputed facts based upon the testimony and evidence admitted by the Judge. The answers to these questions are called the verdict.

### Will I Be Paid For Being a Juror?

Yes. You will be paid a minimum of \$6 for the first day or fraction of the first day. You

will be paid a minimum of \$40 per day or fraction of a day for juror service beginning on the second day.

### **Must My Employer Pay Me While I Am On Jury Duty?**

Your employer is not required to pay you while on jury duty; however, employers are prohibited by law from firing an employee for serving as a juror.

### **Who Can Have a Jury Trial?**

Any person charged with a criminal offense or any party to a civil case has a right to a jury trial. All parties are equal before the law and each is entitled to the same fair treatment.

### **Are There Rules About Jury Conduct?**

Yes. The Texas Supreme Court has rules to assist you in your conduct as a juror, which will be given to you by the Judge.

### **What If I Fail to Respond to a Jury Summons or Give Incorrect Information to Get Out of Service?**

The consequences of not appearing for jury service or falsely claiming an exemption can involve a fine, contempt of court and/or criminal penalties.

### **How Is a Juror Selected For a Particular Case?**

Cases will usually be heard by juries of 6 or 12 jurors. A larger group, called a panel, will be sent to the trial court (courtroom) where the jurors will be questioned under the supervision of the Judge. A juror may be excused from the panel if it is shown that the juror cannot act impartially concerning the case to be heard. In addition, each side is allowed to remove a given number of jurors from the panel without having to show any reason. However, a juror may not be removed because of his or her race or gender. The trial jury will be the first 6 or 12 of the remaining jurors on the panel.

### **What Is Voir Dire or Questioning of the Jury Panel?**

It is a way for the parties to select a fair and impartial jury. Under the justice system, you may be questioned by each of the lawyers before they decide to remove

a certain number of jurors from the jury panel. For example, the lawyer may ask you questions to see if you are connected to the trial or if you have any prejudice or bias toward anyone in the trial. These questions are not intended to embarrass you, but rather to help the lawyers in the jury selection process. You may ask the Judge to allow you to answer some questions away from the other jurors.

### **What If I Have a Special Need or Emergency?**

After you have been selected as a juror on a trial panel, if you have a special need or an emergency, tell the bailiff.

### **May I Discuss the Case After It Is Over?**

After you are discharged from jury service, you are released from the obligation of secrecy. You will then be free to discuss the case and your deliberations with anyone. However, you are also free to decline to discuss the case and your deliberations if you wish.

### **Order of Events of the Trial**

#### **Opening Statements:**

The lawyers for each side may explain the case, the evidence they will present, and the issues for you to decide.

#### **Presentation of Evidence:**

The evidence consists of the testimony of witnesses and the exhibits allowed by the Judge. Exhibits admitted into evidence will be available to the jury for examination during deliberations. You have a right to ask for them. You will be asked to make decisions regarding disputed facts; therefore, your attention at all times is critically important. Juror note-taking or the submission of questions by jurors to witnesses will be determined by the Judge.

#### **Rulings By the Judge:**

The Judge may be asked to decide questions of law during the trial. Occasionally, the Judge may ask jurors to leave the courtroom while the lawyers make their legal arguments. The jurors should understand that such interruptions are needed to make sure that their verdict is based

upon proper evidence, as determined by the Judge under the Rules of Evidence. You may give the evidence whatever weight you consider appropriate.

#### **Instructions to the Jury:**

At the close of all the evidence, the Judge may submit to the jury the Charge of the Court. This will include legal instructions on this particular case and the questions that the jury is to answer from the evidence admitted.

#### **Closing Arguments:**

After the Charge of the Court, the lawyers have the opportunity to summarize the evidence in their closing arguments and to try to persuade the jury to accept their client's view of the case.

#### **Deliberations and Verdict of the Jury:**

Following closing arguments, the jury is sent to deliberate. When the jury has answered the questions asked of them they shall return their verdict. The verdict must be based solely on the evidence presented by the parties, the Charge of the Court, and the rules of law provided by the Judge.

#### **When In Doubt, Ask the Judge:**

You have the right to communicate with the Judge regarding any matters affecting your deliberations, including but not limited to: 1) physical comfort; 2) special needs; 3) any questions regarding evidence; or, 4) the Charge of the Court. During deliberation, if it becomes necessary to communicate with the Judge, the bailiff or the officer of the court will deliver jurors' notes to the Judge. The information in this document is not intended to take the place of the instructions given by the Judge in any case. In the event of conflict, the Judge's instructions will prevail.

*Note: Not all of these rules apply in Justice or Municipal Courts.*

For additional copies, please contact:

State Bar of Texas  
Public Information Department  
1414 Colorado, Austin, Texas 78701  
1-800-204-2222 ext. 1800 or  
tsweet@texasbar.com

**You are required to pass through the Metal Detector (unless otherwise approved) and have all bags, purses, briefcases etc. searched before you may enter the Court**

**Rules of Conduct and Court Decorum**  
**For the City of Forney Municipal Court of Record No. 1**

**I. AUTHORITY FOR RULES**

Under the inherent power and duty of all Texas Courts as codified in Section 21.002, Government Code, the following Rules of Conduct and Decorum shall apply and govern any and all proceedings held before the Municipal Court of the City of Forney, County of Kaufman, State of Texas.

**II. FORMAL OPENING**

Each session of court shall be brought to order by formal announcement by the Bailiff of the Court, requiring all to rise as the Judge takes the Bench.

**III. CONDUCT REQUIRED OF ALL PERSONS WHILE ATTENDING COURT**

While Court is in session there shall be:

- a. No Smoking or use of tobacco products.
- b. No chewing gum or candy.
- c. No reading newspapers or magazines.
- d. No propping of feet or sitting on tables, chairs, benches, or railings.
- e. No talking or loud noises.
- f. No food or beverages.
- g. No gestures, facial expressions, or sounds indicating approval or disapproval.
- h. No inappropriate attire including, but not limited to:
  1. Tank tops
  2. Muscle shirts
  3. Vulgar or offensive language on shirts
  4. Shorts unless part of a work uniform and otherwise appropriate
  5. Hats
- i. No video or audio recording equipment of any kind shall be turned on in the Courtroom without the prior approval of the Judge. Such equipment includes but is not limited to: still cameras, video cameras, and all audio recording devices. **NO PORTABLE PHONES MAY BE USED IN THE COURT ROOM.** Personal pagers may be used in the vibrating or silent position.
- j. No weapons are permitted except those carried or possessed by commissioned peace officers, or as needed for evidence in court.
- k. Disruptive children must remain in the lobby and must be accompanied by an adult.

**II. CONDUCT REQUIRED OF COUNSEL AND PRO SE DEFENDANTS**

- a. Attorneys shall observe the letter and spirit of the canons of ethics, including those concerning improper ex parte communications with the Judge and those dealing with discussion of cases with representatives of the media.
- b. Attorneys shall advise their clients and witnesses of the Rules of Decorum that may be applicable.
- c. Pro se Defendants (defendants acting as their own defense) shall conform their behavior to all provisions applicable to Counsel.
- d. Counsel shall be dressed appropriately while in attendance of the Court, unless otherwise permitted by the Court.
- e. All parties shall be prompt in arriving for Court and in attending to Court business.
- f. Once a party has entered the courtroom and is appearing before the Court, he / she shall not leave without obtaining permission from the Court.
- g. All remarks of counsel to the Court shall be addressed to the Court formally.
- h. All objections, arguments and other comments shall be directed to the Judge or Jury and not to opposing counsel.
- i. In addressing the Court, Counsel shall rise and remain standing at their positions at counsel table.
- j. Counsel shall not lean on the bench, sit on the rails or tables, or appear to engage the Court in a confidential manner.
- k. The Court may enforce these rules of conduct and decorum by appropriate action or sanctions.
- l. Request for a language interpreter should be made at the time a plea is entered.
- m. Court Clerks cannot provide legal advice. Reliance upon a police officer's verbal statement(s) regarding disposition of an offense is not binding upon the court.
- n. Attorneys must remain with their client(s) until all paperwork is completed / signed.
- o. Nothing herein shall prevent or prohibit the further adoption of additional rules of decorum.

Margaret E. Spain, Presiding Judge  
October 11, 2013