

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT**

**STEFAN R. UNDERHILL  
CHIEF U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE**



**THIS LETTER IS IMPORTANT – PLEASE READ**

You have received a summons that requires you to report for jury service. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has required substantial changes to the way our court empanels juries and conducts trials, this letter explains what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what measures we are taking to keep you safe.

***Why is the court holding jury trials during the pandemic emergency?***

The Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees defendants in criminal cases the right to a speedy and public trial. The Seventh Amendment guarantees the right to a jury trial in most civil cases. We do not have the option of cancelling all jury trials.

***Why can't the court postpone all trials indefinitely?***

Our court did not hold any jury trials between March and September due to the pandemic. There are a large number of cases awaiting trial, and every week the list grows longer. We need to conduct jury trials when it is safe to do so. To wait longer is unfair to the parties, and especially to criminal defendants, who again have a right to a speedy trial under the Constitution.

***What are you doing to ensure that the trial is safe?***

We have been working with a public health consultant to advise us how to conduct a trial while minimizing the risk of infection to everyone concerned. Among other things, we will be using health-screening processes, physical barriers, social distancing, masks, and enhanced cleaning in order to try to provide a safe environment. A more detailed description of how we plan to operate is attached.

***What about prospective jurors who are sick or have symptoms of COVID-19?***

It is important that we try to keep anyone who has COVID-19, or who may have symptoms

of the disease, from coming to the courthouse. Do not attempt to serve on a jury if there is any reasonable possibility that you may be sick or infectious.

***How will the court assess the health status of prospective jurors?***

We are asking you to answer questions that will help us determine whether you should be excused from jury service before you have to report in person to the courthouse. A COVID-19 questionnaire will be mailed along with your summons. You may submit the completed questionnaire through eJuror (instructions are provided in your summons paperwork), or you may return the questionnaire to the Court in paper form in the return envelope provided. Please be careful to provide truthful and accurate information.

As the date for your jury service approaches, you will be asked to conduct a COVID-19 symptom self-check to determine whether you have COVID-19 or any of its symptoms before reporting to the courthouse. If you are chosen to serve as a juror, you will be asked to assess your health every morning before reporting to the courthouse for trial. If you exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms during your jury service, please contact your jury clerk immediately.

***What about prospective jurors who have higher risk factors?***

We understand that there will be jurors who may be at higher risk from COVID-19, based on their own health situation, or who may be living with or caring for people who are at higher risk. If you think you fall into one of those categories, and seek to be excused on that basis, you should let us know by completing the online eJuror questionnaire and contacting your jury clerk immediately. The presiding judge and the court staff will review those requests on an individual basis.

***What about prospective jurors who have child care issues?***

We also understand that the pandemic continues to affect our daily lives, including the schedules of school-aged children. We recognize that some jurors may have greater child care issues, due to the remote learning and/or modified schedules that schools, day care centers, and other facilities may have adopted. If you seek to be excused on that basis, there will be an opportunity to address that basis for being excused from jury service when you are called to report to the courthouse. The presiding judge and the court staff will review those requests on an individual basis.

***What else does the Court expect from prospective jurors?***

First and foremost, we need your cooperation in assessing and disclosing any signs or symptoms of COVID-19, now and as the date for your jury service approaches. Again, it is important to try to keep anyone who is experiencing symptoms or who has recently tested positive from coming to the courthouse. We also need your cooperation in abiding by the various requirements and restrictions that we are putting into place, such as wearing a mask and maintaining proper distances.

A more detailed description of what we expect from prospective jurors is included in our COVID-19 Juror Handbook, a copy of which may be found here (<http://ctd.uscourts.gov/jury-info>) or by asking your jury clerk for an electronic copy.

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We trust that you will take your obligations as a citizen and prospective juror seriously, and that you will make every effort to comply with our instructions. We also understand that many of you may be anxious about your jury service, or may have additional questions about the process. You may email or call your jury clerk with any questions. Their contact information is located in your summons paperwork or on the following web page:  
<http://ctd.uscourts.gov/contact-parking-information>.

Our system of justice depends on jury trials—that is, it depends on the good judgment and common sense of ordinary citizens, of all ages and from all walks of life, who are willing and able to serve as jurors. Serving as a juror is one of the most important responsibilities we have as citizens in a democratic society. You will also find it to be a rewarding experience. Jury service is a vital service to the community and your fellow citizens. Thank you for your cooperation and willingness to serve.

## **CHANGES TO COURT PROCEDURES TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND SAFETY DURING COURT PROCEEDINGS**

The following are examples of some of the changes we are adopting, with the advice of our public health consultant, to try to ensure that jury trials will be safe for all participants.

**Courtroom Size.** Trials will occur in our largest courtrooms, in order to maximize social distancing of the participants, and in courtrooms with the best ventilation, in order to ensure appropriate air circulation, exchange, and filtration.

**Courtroom Layout.** We are rearranging the layout of our courtrooms, again to provide for proper social distancing. The jurors will not all be seated in the jury box; instead, they will be more widely dispersed in the courtroom to maximize distancing. Lawyer tables will be moved in order to be spaced farther away from the jury. Lawyers will also be restricted in their ability to move about the courtroom.

**Physical Barriers.** We are installing plexiglass barriers at various points in some courtrooms to further separate the participants from one another.

**Masks.** All participants other than a witness who is testifying will be required to wear masks. Please make sure the mask covers your nose and mouth at all times.

**Hand Sanitizers.** Hand sanitizer will be readily available at strategic locations throughout the courthouse.

**Use of Electronics.** Certain types of communications, such as sidebar conferences between the lawyers and the judge, may be conducted electronically with headsets. All other devices are prohibited in the courtrooms, unless authorized by a judge.

**Staggered Entry Times.** In cases involving large jury pools, jurors will be instructed to arrive at the courthouse on the day of jury empanelment in small numbers, and/or at staggered times, in order to reduce the number of people in the jury assembly area and the courtrooms.

**Jury Meeting and Deliberation Rooms.** In order to permit social distancing, juries will meet, and ultimately deliberate, in an adjacent courtroom or other large room rather than the standard jury deliberation rooms.

**Stairways and Elevators.** Stairways may be used in certain courthouses, and elevator occupancy has been limited to two individuals at a time. Please be sure to social distance while waiting for an elevator.

Because public health information and recommended practices continue to evolve, we will continue to work with our public-health consultant to ensure that our precautions remain appropriate and provide a safe environment for jurors, parties, witnesses, lawyers, and other participants in the trial process.

## **WHAT WE EXPECT FROM JURORS**

You will receive instructions from the court about your duties and obligations as jurors, both during the empanelment process and the trial itself. In addition, the following special instructions apply because of the COVID-19 pandemic:

**Do not come to court if you are sick.** Again, it is important that you do NOT report for jury service, or come to the courthouse, if you are sick or showing any symptoms of COVID-19.

**Provide accurate information when requested.** Please respond carefully and accurately to all requests for information concerning your health or your personal circumstances, beginning with the questions that you are being asked with your summons and COVID-19 Juror Questionnaire.

**Wear a mask.** You must wear a mask in the courthouse, and it must be worn properly, covering the nose and mouth. If you are selected to serve as a trial juror, the judge may require that you wear a court-provided mask for uniformity and recognizability.

**Bring a lunch, snacks, and water.** Your ability to leave the courthouse to pick up a takeout lunch may be limited. Our drinking fountains will be blocked off.

**Bring reading materials.** We will make every effort to avoid unnecessary delays, but we do expect that jury empanelment will proceed much more slowly than usual.

**Thank you for your cooperation and patience!**