



# CALL TO DUTY

Improving the jury system.

BY KACI SINGER

**Y**ou have been summoned for jury service.” The feelings evoked when reading those words on an envelope pulled from the mailbox vary from person to person. Some are excited about the prospect of experiencing the court system in the role of jurors. Others dread the thought of making a decision that impacts someone else in a powerful way. Still others worry about the costs of missed work or the hassles of juggling schedules.

For those who actually attend when summoned, the process itself can be overwhelming and frustrating. Parking can be expensive or difficult to find. Hours may pass without getting information about why there is delay. Food and drink may not be readily accessible nearby.

The State Bar of Texas Jury Service Committee’s purpose is “to concern itself with improving the manner in which jurors are treated within the judicial process, including compensation, and developing and implementing programs to ensure broad citizen participation in and support for our jury system.”

In recent years, the committee has focused on this in several ways. The 84th Texas Legislature designated the first week in May as Jury Appreciation Week “in recognition of the outstanding and important contributions made by Texas citizens who serve as jurors.” For the inaugural year in 2016, the committee created and distributed stickers, similar to the “I Voted” stickers, for courts to provide to jurors serving during that week. The sticker templates are still available and counties can even print them for jurors throughout the year if they wish. The committee has also developed a Jury Appreciation Week Guide, which includes ideas for the week, a Juror Information Guide for the public, a Jury Service Toolkit for attorneys seeking to educate the public, and a sample thank-you note for judges to provide those who serve.

In addition, the committee has published press releases in an effort to increase public awareness of the multitude of jury scams that have become so common, many of which include criminal efforts to extract money from law-abiding citizens by convincing them they have missed jury duty. The committee has a goal of creating a public service announcement regarding both jury scams and the importance of jury duty, hopefully featuring well-known Texans involved in the entertainment or sports industry. (If you have any such contacts that would be willing to be featured in this PSA, the committee would appreciate your assistance—particularly if your contact is a certain minister of culture at the University of Texas.)

The committee has also paired with the Law Focused Education Committee to assist with creation of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills-compliant curriculum regarding jury service that can be provided by attorneys or teachers in Texas schools. The lesson is available at [texaslre.org/attorney-resources](http://texaslre.org/attorney-resources) under middle school lessons.

Finally, in order to get feedback directly from those called for jury duty, the committee has an open, ongoing poll at [texasbar.com/jurysurvey](http://texasbar.com/jurysurvey). Jurors have provided and continue to provide feedback on their experiences with the jury system, including suggestions for improvements. Areas for improvement that rate high include juror pay, parking, and the amount of time jurors sit around and wait. On a positive note, many jurors feel appreciated and enjoy the process. The surveys also indicate that many believe the use of technology to eliminate the traditional “cattle call” empaneling process and to notify them if they do not need to appear would do a lot to improve the jury process.

The right to a trial by jury is a fundamental one. It is important that we appreciate those who serve not only with words, but also with improvements to the process when possible.

For more information on the State Bar’s jury service resources, go to [texasbar.com/juryservice](http://texasbar.com/juryservice). **TBJ**



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