# Citizens Make the Justice System Work by Serving as Jurors

By Chief Justice Charles W. Daniels, New Mexico Supreme Court

As we celebrate national Law Day on May 1 and Juror Appreciation Week in New Mexico, I would like to recognize the vital role each citizen plays in preserving the rule of law by serving on juries in our state courts.

New Mexico courts each year summon about 10 percent of the state's adult population to participate in jury service. Along with the ballot box, the jury box is one of the two most direct forms of citizen participation in our system of self-government.

The New Mexico and United States constitutions guarantee the right to a jury trial as a fundamental feature for administering justice in both criminal and civil cases. But that constitutional protection hinges on citizens who respect the importance of their role.

Because we appreciate those who sacrifice their time to serve as jurors, the court system is actively working on ways to minimize burdens that can accompany jury service. For example, we are implementing a new statewide computer system to improve jury service for New Mexicans. The system will offer a range of Web-based options for jurors, allowing them to complete their questionnaires and qualifications forms online as well as make requests to be excused or postponed from jury service, check their status, and be notified of any changes. Rather than make a telephone call to hear a prerecorded message, jurors will be able to use a computer or mobile electronic device to determine when they must report to a courthouse for service. Courts also will be able to notify jurors by email or text message when it is no longer necessary to come to the courthouse because of a last-minute case settlement or weather delay or other unanticipated development.

Taxpayers will benefit because the new jury management computer system can improve the efficiency of courts. Juror forms, questionnaires, and requests for rescheduling will be processed more quickly if they are submitted online rather than being sent by mail. The system will provide better data to help courts effectively determine how many people are needed for jury service. All of this can help save both money and time for the judicial system and the citizens who serve as jurors.

In New Mexico's court system, jurors must be at least 18 years old, U.S. citizens, and reside in the county in which they may serve as jurors. Because our state constitution textually mandates that no citizen can be excluded from jury service for inability to speak or understand English, our courts provide interpreters to accommodate those speaking other languages. The framers of the constitution understood that to fulfill the critical role jurors serve in administering justice, it was important that jury pools truly represent the diversity of our people and our communities.

The call to jury duty is more than just another civic obligation. It offers citizens a voice in the governance of their own communities and provides a way to peacefully resolve conflicts through a well-defined system of legal principles rather than arbitrary decision-making.

By serving on juries, citizens make both the American system of justice and the American democracy work. On behalf of the New Mexico judiciary, I salute our fellow citizens who appreciate and honor our need for their dedicated service.

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