



Superior Court of California
County of Mendocino
100 N. State St., Ukiah, CA 95482
www.mendocino.courts.ca.gov/

PRESS RELEASE

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COURT PLANS TO LAUNCH A JUROR COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

Since jury trials have resumed post-pandemic, the number of individuals honoring their summons and appearing for jury duty has declined to an alarmingly low percentage. In a few instances, trials could not go forward because the number of potential jurors was insufficient to empanel a jury. Therefore, the court is planning to implement a juror compliance program that will ensure that the number of potential jurors is sufficient to allow trials to be conducted. Mendocino Superior Court Jury Commissioner Kim Turner states, “The lack of response by potential jurors is alarming and impacts our ability to adjudicate cases, especially criminal cases. This situation has become so dire the court has no choice but to set up a compliance program that will compel a better rate of response from potential jurors.”

California law requires that trial courts in each county reach out to their community members to serve on jury duty. However, over the past several years, the number of eligible jurors that have chosen to disregard their jury summons notification has increased significantly. Serving on a jury is an important civic duty of all US citizens that are between the ages of 18 and 75 and that are not eligible for an exemption due to a medical condition, inability to communicate in English, caregiving for an ill or disabled family member or caring for a young child.

In Mendocino, the court may call jurors as often as once a year. However, the court is on a *one-day, one trial* jury system, which means that if a juror is called, appears for jury duty and is not assigned to a trial, the juror will be excused for at least the next 12 months. Even if sent to a courtroom for possible empanelment, jurors have an opportunity to tell the judge if they have financial or travel hardships that make it difficult to serve on a trial. In many instances, judges excuse those jurors from service. Jury duty is not just an obligation; it is a chance to participate in a meaningful way in the Mendocino community. In fact, most people who serve on a jury report that the experience was worthwhile – interesting and a rare opportunity to participate in ensuring a fair and impartial outcome for defendants, victims and the general public.

California Code of Civil Procedure section 209 gives courts the authority to impose sanctions on individuals that fail to show up for jury duty. In the next few months, the court will reach out to potential jurors that do not respond to their summons to encourage them to reschedule their service for a later date. If that outreach is not successful, the court will send one more urgent request that the juror comply with the legal requirement to serve. If that second attempt is not successful, the court will send notices to jurors to appear in front of a judge to explain why they did not respond to these repeated notices. At that hearing, a judge may order the juror to appear on the next date when jurors are needed or may fine the juror up to \$1,500 for failure to comply with this civic duty. Presiding Judge Keith Faulder states, “I would much rather potential jurors honor their commitment and appear for jury duty than sanction them for failure to take this obligation seriously.”

The evolution of the right to an impartial jury of one's peers reaches all the way back to the Magna Carta in 1215 AD. While the Magna Carta did not institute the jury system we know today, it introduced the concept that community members needed to be a part of the judicial process to ensure fairness and prevent the king's dominion of the courts. Jury duty is also enshrined in the US Constitution in Articles 6 and 7. The framers of the Constitution considered the fundamental right to an impartial jury to be one of the cornerstones of self-governance in our new Republic. This important feature of our system of government must be perpetuated and should be honored and respected by all.

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