**Jury duty in the time of COVID-19**

Due to the pandemic, courtrooms across the country were closed for several months. This means that jury trials were postponed, which means justice for crime victims and holding wrongdoers accountable came to a complete stop, like everything else in the world. When trials do not go forward, justice is delayed. Fortunately, courtrooms opened in the past few months and jury trials resumed.

From the King County Superior Court: “Jury trials are required under our constitution and key to the fair administration of justice. Jurors from a broad spectrum of the community are critical to just outcomes and trust in the justice process. Jury service is a vitally important civic duty, and we’re committed to making it a safe experience for all involved.”

Most people dread jury duty. They would rather be at work or home. They are much too busy and not interested. I will tell you that everyone who has served as a juror on my case has always enjoyed the experience. They feel a connection to their community. They feel like they really did something, which is to deliver justice. Who else can say they did that on any given day? Hopefully, you enjoy the experience and don’t try to just find a way to get out of it.

Jury duty, however, during the pandemic has changed. The courtrooms in Washington have all made steps to make sure that everyone is safe, including jurors, the court staff, and the lawyers, and that everything is safe and clean. To make sure nobody gets sick while serving jury duty and to make sure all of you show up to jury duty.

Most courts are holding trials either in person, like before the pandemic, but many are virtual via Zoom. This means jurors participate in jury duty from the comfort and safety of their own home. Here is the current information on local courts currently:

-The federal courts (both Seattle and Tacoma) have mostly been all virtual.

-In King County, courts have done a mix of both – jury duty is from home via Zoom. If you are selected as a juror, you are asked to come to the courthouse, which is temporarily at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue until the end of 2020.

-In Snohomish County, some proceedings are being held virtually via Zoom, depending on the type of case, and jury trials are in-person at the courthouse.

-In Pierce County, some proceedings are in-person at a remote facility, not the courthouse, and some are in-person at the courthouse. Jurors report to courthouse for jury selection and then will report to designated off-site location for trial, if selected.

The courthouses are all following all safety guidelines, per the State and the CDC. This includes wearing face masks in the courthouse and cleaning/sanitizing all surfaces. For the purposes of jury duty, if you do not have a face mask, one will be provided to you for free. If you are unable to wear a face mask due to any medical issues, you will be provided with a face shield. These questions will be asked of you BEFORE you even report for jury duty. Before the pandemic, you had to just show up to the courthouse on the date you were scheduled in your jury duty summons. Now, when you receive a jury duty summons, it will come with a questionnaire and ask you if you are feeling sick, have symptoms, or have been tested for COVID. It will also ask if you have any medical issues that prevent you from serving on a jury. In addition, whether you have any economic hardship. If you do not have any of those issues, then your questionnaire then will be reviewed and you may be selected to participate in jury selection, or voir dire, via Zoom (in King County) or in-person, depending on the court.

Before the proceeding and on the day and time of your scheduled appearance at jury duty via Zoom, you must verify you have access to the necessary video equipment including strong wifi and Zoom technology. A private computer is best, or your smartphone (download the Zoom app) in a quiet location. Your device will need a camera and mic so you have video and audio available.

The Court's bailiff will provide you instructions on how to join the virtual proceeding. The instructions will include a link, a phone number, the meeting ID, and a password that you will need to join.

If you are selected for the jury after the Zoom jury selection, which can last all day, then you will receive instructions on where to go for trial. It may be at the courthouse, or another substitute building. At the facility, you will be seated more than 6 feet apart, with masks, and plenty of hand sanitizer. The courts are working to make sure everyone is safe. Do not be scared to go to court due to COVID. If, however, you are afraid to serve jury duty, that is perfectly fine and you should tell the court before jury selection or during jury selection via Zoom. No lawyers want any jurors to feel unsafe or scared and certainly do not want to put anyone’s health at risk. They understand and will excuse you from jury duty service.

If you have any questions about jury duty, do not hesitate to call the clerk at the courthouse. Everyone is happy to help to get jurors back in the courtrooms, even virtually!