

During Trial

Do

- Do arrive on time and return promptly after breaks and lunch. The trial cannot proceed until all jurors are present.
- Do pay close attention. If you cannot hear what is being said, raise your hand and let the judge know.
- Do keep an open mind throughout the trial.
- Do listen carefully to the instructions read by the judge. Remember, it is your duty to accept what the judge is saying about the law, and how it is to be applied to the case.
- Do take notes during the trial if necessary to help you remember critical information, unless the judge instructs you otherwise.

Don't

- Don't get information about the case from the news media or any other outside source. If you accidentally hear outside information about the case during the trial, tell a member of the court staff in private.
- Don't try to guess what the judge thinks about the case. Remember the rulings from the bench do not reflect the judge's personal views.
- Don't talk about the case, or issues raised by the case, with anyone, including other jurors, while the trial is going on—unless the judge instructs you otherwise.
- Don't try to uncover evidence on your own. Decide the case only on the basis of evidence presented at the trial.
- Don't talk to the lawyers, parties, or witnesses about anything. This will avoid the impression that something unfair is going on.
- Don't let others talk about the case in your presence, even family members. If someone insists on talking to you or another juror about the case, please report the matter to a court employee. These rules are designed to help you keep an open mind during the trial.

The Maryland Judiciary is committed to making jury service accessible to everyone. If you have any concerns about accessibility issues (for example, for disabled citizens), please contact your Jury Commissioner in advance.

During jury deliberations you should:

- Work out any differences with other jurors through complete and fair discussion of the evidence and the judge's instructions. You should listen to the views of other jurors.
- Refrain from marking, writing, injuring, or changing the trial exhibits.
- Refrain from trying to guess what might happen if the case is appealed. Appellate courts deal only with legal questions; they will not change a verdict if the jury decided the facts based on proper evidence and instructions.
- Make sure you do not talk to anyone about deliberations or about the verdict until the judge discharges the jury. After the jury is discharged, you may discuss the verdict and the deliberations with anyone you choose, but you are not obligated to do so.

More questions? Contact the Jury Commissioner's Office at 410-845-4849 or visit the jury service website:

mdcourts.gov/juryservice/

Sponsored by the Maryland Judiciary Public Awareness Committee.

Trial Jury Service in Somerset County



an informative guide

Your service as a juror is what makes our justice system the finest in the world.

On behalf of the Maryland Judiciary, I offer our thanks.

Robert M. Bell

Trial Jury Service

Frequently Asked Questions

How Was I Chosen?

Juries are selected at random from a cross section of Maryland citizens and drawn from driver's license and voter registration pools.

To be eligible for jury duty, you must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, a resident of the county where the trial is being conducted, and able to read, write, and understand English. You may request to be exempted if you can produce written documentation to show that you:

- Have served as a juror in the preceding three years;
- Are a certified member of the military and jury service would interfere with military duties; or
- Are at least 70 years of age and request exemption in writing.

You may also be disqualified if you have been convicted of certain federal or state criminal offenses. If you meet any of these criteria, please provide details in writing to the Jury Commissioner in your court before your first day of jury duty.

Where Do I Report?

Report at the time and place indicated on your summons unless you are notified by the court not to appear. The night before you are scheduled to report, call the number on your summons to be certain that you still must appear. If the message is not clear or silent, report as scheduled. You will be directed to a courtroom or given other instructions.

What Happens Next?

In the courtroom, the judge will tell you about the case and introduce you to the lawyers and others involved in the case. You also will take an oath promising to answer all questions truthfully.

After you are sworn in, you and other potential members of the jury will go through a process known as "voir dire," or jury selection. During jury selection, the judge and the lawyers question you and other members of the panel to find out whether any of you have any knowledge of the case, a personal interest in the outcome, or any interest in the case that might make it hard to be impartial.

What Types of Cases Will I Hear?

Jury cases are either civil or criminal. Civil cases are disputes between private citizens, corporations, governments, government agencies, or other organizations. Usually, the party that brings the suit (the plaintiff) asks for money damages for some wrong alleged to have been done.

The State brings a criminal case against one or more persons accused of committing a crime. The person accused of the crime is the defendant. The State must prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" that the defendant committed the alleged crime.

How Long Will I Serve?

Most trials last one to two days. However, trials can last up to several weeks, and in rare occasions several months, depending on the complexity of the issues and evidence in a particular case. The judge will inform you during jury selection as to the anticipated length of the trial.

During the trial, you may have to wait in the courtroom while the judge and lawyers settle questions of law. Judges and other courtroom staff will do everything they can to minimize the waiting both before and during the trial. You may bring reading material for use during waiting periods.

Parties often settle their differences moments before the trial is scheduled to begin. In such instances, you will be excused with the thanks of the court.

What Do I Wear ?

To observe courtroom decorum, consider how you would dress for an office job, or for a job interview. Generally, no shorts, T-shirts with logos, or revealing tops are permitted.

What Should I Not Bring?

Do not bring cell phones, pagers, other electronic devices, pocketknives, mace, etc. to court. Children shall not accompany you to jury service.

What Happens During a Trial?

Events in a trial usually happen in a particular order, though the order may be changed by the judge. Here is the usual order of events:

- Step 1: Selection of the jury
- Step 2: Opening statements
- Step 3: Presentation of the evidence
- Step 4: Jury instructions
- Step 5: Closing arguments
- Step 6: Jury deliberations
- Step 7: Announcement of the verdict

What If I Have an Emergency?

Your absence can delay a trial. It is important that you report each day you are required. If an emergency occurs, such as a sudden illness, accident, or death in the family, tell the court staff immediately.

What about My Job?

Your employer cannot deprive you of your job because of job time you lose as a result of service as a juror.