

July 29, 2020

Good evening. I am writing regarding the upcoming jury selection process in order to highlight some of the changes that will take place in response to the pandemic.

For your information, the Governor's office posted the following FAQ at <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Targeted-Mitigation-FAQ.aspx> regarding the Governor's order dated July 15, 2020, directing targeted mitigation measures:

Does the prohibition on indoor events and gatherings of more than 25 people apply to the judiciary or court functions, such as jury selection and trials?  
No. The court system, acting principally through its judicial districts, is responsible for taking the necessary actions to protect the safety of court staff, court users, judges and the public, guided by general CDC and Department of Health recommendations. The Judiciary is working to protect public health while ensuring that individuals retain their fundamental state and federal constitutional rights to trial by jury. To that end, the Department of Health assisted the judiciary in developing recommended guidelines designed to ensure that jury selection and jury trials can be conducted safely.

Initially, the Courts had planned to conduct jury selections in the spacious building across the street from the courthouse for social distancing purposes; however, the Courts were unable to secure the approval of the Commissioners. Consequently, we will be conducting jury selections in the courthouse, and in order to limit the number of individuals in the courthouse, at most, we will have one selection in the morning and one in the afternoon. Further, in order to limit the number of individuals entering the courthouse at the same time, juror reporting times will be staggered.

When prospective jurors call the Juror Instruction Phone Number to see if their juror number has been called for the following day, they will be instructed not to report for service if they are experiencing, or experienced in the preceding 14 days, symptoms such as a fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, or other symptoms of COVID-19; or if they have been exposed to someone within the last 14 days who is experiencing similar symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19; or if they have traveled to an area with a high number of cases of COVID-19. Instead, they will be told to contact the Office of the District Court Administrator for further instruction. Additionally, prospective jurors will be reminded to bring their own snack and a drink in a plastic bottle/container with them to jury selection as well as a book or magazine to occupy their time during any periods of inactivity.

Court staff will be located outside the entrance to the courthouse instructing individuals to social distance and wear their face mask (and providing a mask to those who do not have one).

All entrants will be temperature screened. Those with a temperature greater than 100.4

will be denied access to the courthouse.

All jurors, attorneys, and court staff involved in the jury selection process will be required to wear a face mask and shield. If an individual does not have these, they will be provided. If an individual indicates they cannot wear a face mask for medical reasons, they will be allowed access with a face shield. If an individual indicates they are not able to wear a face mask nor a shield for medical reasons, they will be denied access. Jurors may be instructed by the presiding judge to lower their mask (but retain their face shield) during the voir dire process.

Hand sanitizer will be located throughout the courthouse and in the courtrooms. Disposable "Juror" stickers rather than buttons will be distributed to jurors.

Court staff will be located in the lobby of the courthouse encouraging social distancing in the elevators and stairwells. Additional staff will be located on the 2nd floor of the courthouse encouraging social distancing as jurors are lined up to be checked in.

For social distancing purposes, the jury room and courtroom #4 will be used as jury assembly rooms. Only the two largest courtrooms will be used for jury selection (courtroom #1 and #3). Jurors will be social distanced in the jury assembly rooms and courtroom. All cloth chairs will be removed from the jury room and courtrooms prior to jury selection.

A group of approximately 34 jurors will be sent into the courtroom for selection.

We take your health and safety and that of our jurors and staff very seriously. We believe that with the precautions we are implementing, we can safely conduct jury selections and trials.

The processes and precautions I've outlined will continue to be assessed and are subject to change as additional information and guidance becomes available. As always, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Adrienne J. Stahl  
District Court Administrator