

Jury Duty

Definitions

Bailiffs - The official in each courtroom who attends to the security and comforts of the judges, jurors, and the court in general.

Bench - The seat occupied by judges in court.

Bill of Information - A formal charge of violation of a criminal statute made against a person by the District Attorney and filed with the Clerk of Court.

Challenge - During the selection of a particular jury (see voir dire), attorneys for either side may wish to suggest to the court that certain individuals be excused from service for this particular jury. There are two types of challenges. (A) A challenge for cause is made when an attorney believes that an individual being challenged is in some way not appropriate for a particular case. For example, a person who was recently a party to a personal injury suit or who is a relative of the attorneys or parties in the present suit, may find it difficult or impossible to be completely objective. The decision as to the validity of a challenge for cause is made by the judge. (B) The law allows each side in a case a limited number of preemptory challenges which it may exercise if it so chooses. The judge automatically grants preemptory challenges.

Chambers - The private room or office of a judge.

Civil law - Civil trials, as distinguished from criminal trials, deal with disputes between individuals, corporation, and/or other private entities or public entities such as the City-Parish or State, in which no violation of a specific criminal law is charged.

Criminal law - That law dealing with actions or omissions which have been identified by a legislative body as being contrary to the public interest, and to which criminal penalties have been attached.

Cross-examination - Examination of a witness by the party opposed to the one who produced him, in order to further develop and to test the truth of his testimony.

Defendant - In a civil action, the party against whom suit is brought; the party who is being sued. In a criminal case, the defendant is the person who is charged with violation of a criminal statute.

Direct-examination - The first examination of a witness by the party on whose behalf he is called.

Expert witness - A person qualified to speak authoritatively on a certain subject on the basis of skill, training or experience. The court is responsible for determining the qualifications of an expert witness to testify in a particular case. An expert witness may offer opinions as well as observations within his field of expertise.

Grand Jury - A special jury which serves during each session of criminal court as a body to inquire into complaints and accusations of violations of criminal laws. Grand Juries may hear testimony and receive evidence, and may bring charges in the form of an indictment against individuals. A Grand Jury does not find innocence or guilt; it simply determines whether or not sufficient evidence exists to bring formal charges before the court.

Indictment - A formal accusation, by a Grand Jury, that a person has violated one or more specific criminal statutes. The charge is presented to a court.

Instructions - The directions given by the judge to the jury concerning the law which applies in the case at hand, and the manner in which the jury is to apply it to the facts as they find them.

I**ntervener** - A person who voluntarily enters an action or other proceeding, with the permission of the court.

J**ury pool** - A randomly chosen group of individuals from which individual jury panels are chosen.

J**ury term** - The length of time for which a citizen serves in a jury pool.

M**otion** - A formal request to the court by an attorney for a specific action by the court. Example: "Your Honor, defense moves the last testimony be stricken from the record."

O**bjection** - In a trial, a lawyer may object (or raise an objection) to a procedure or action in the trial (such as an attempt to introduce certain evidence or to elicit certain testimony) which that lawyer feels should not be permitted under the rules of law which govern the conduct of trials. The judge will make a decision as to whether or not the objection is to be sustained or overruled.

P**anel** - A specific group of prospective jurors from which the jury for a particular case will be chosen. The jury pool is for convenience divided up into panels, which are sent to each court room as the need arises.

P**etit Jury** - A jury of individuals who determine the facts and render a verdict thereon in a particular criminal trial.

P**laintiff** - In a civil action, the person who brings a petition to the court; the party who initiates the action by filing suit.

P**lea** - A defendant's statement, answering the charges against him, or showing why he should not answer.

Settlement - An agreement by which parties having disputed matters between them reach an agreement which concludes the dispute without going to trial.

Statute - A written law, enacted by a legislative body (city council, state legislature, U.S. Congress)

Verdict - The formal decision of the jury. In a criminal case, the decision relates to the guilt or innocence of the defendant. In a civil suit, the decision is whether or not the plaintiff has proved his case against the defendant, and may also include findings as to the amount of damage suffered.

Voir Dire - A prospective juror, prior to being sworn to serve in a trial, is questioned by the judge and the attorneys in that case in order to determine whether he/she is competent and qualified to hear the particular case.

Witness - A person who testifies under oath to what he has seen, heard, or otherwise observed, and whose statement is received as part of the evidence in the case.