



# Marilyn Burgess

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## On the Importance of Jury Service

*by Harris County District Clerk*

The right to trial by jury is the cornerstone of American democracy, guaranteed by both the state and federal constitutions. History has proven that the strength of our jury system strengthens our democracy--by safeguarding ordinary citizens against abuses of power by government, business and even the judicial system itself.

Traditionally, the turnout rate for jury service in Harris County has hovered at or close to only 20 percent. As a result, Courts in Harris County have had a history of being unable to form juries that are truly representative of our diverse communities. If you were on trial, wouldn't you want the option to have a jury of your peers listen to your side of the story? Thankfully, since November 2008, our office has increased the turnout rate to 24 percent, the highest in recorded Harris County history, resulting in a lower number of prospective jurors summoned for jury service each week--saving taxpayers thousands of dollars in mailing and labor costs.

Having reported for jury service myself on two occasions, I am well aware of the inconveniences caused and sacrifices required when reporting for jury service. Therefore, as Harris County District Clerk, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all the citizens of our county who report for jury service. I understand their time is valuable and appreciate their effort to serve.

To make it easier and more convenient for you to serve, our office is always looking for ways to improve jury service experience and help people stay connected to their families and work. This year, we launched free, filtered wireless Internet access to help prospective jurors stay connected and ideally continue to earn an income while waiting to be called to serve. Further, we have installed satellite TV that prospective jurors can enjoy during their service.

As part of our expanded online services, you can now reschedule your jury service for up to a six-month period online at, [www.hcdistrictclerk.com](http://www.hcdistrictclerk.com). Best of all, no questions asked for a first-time reschedule. This means if you are working on a big project or dealing with extraordinary circumstances at home, you may reset



your service to a more convenient date. You may even qualify for an exemption--which can be claimed, without a trip to the courthouse, by simply visiting on our Web site. Moreover, we also allow jurors to re-print their jury summons from our website so they still can receive a free METRO ride by simply presenting their dated summons. Learn more about Exemptions and Qualifications by visiting our Web site [www.hcdistrictclerk.com](http://www.hcdistrictclerk.com) and clicking on the Jury link or Jury icon.

I hope that every person summoned for Harris County jury service will take a moment to think about the importance of serving. I believe you will find that the experience can be rewarding and educational.

Next time you receive a jury summons, consider all the citizens you could be helping by simply responding to it. While you may not be called to serve on a high-profile murder trial or one that makes the news, you could be serving on a jury for a business like your very own deliberating an issue that affects people like yourself, your neighbors or your community as a whole.

Help us to save and protect your tax dollars by participating in jury service. It is a civic service that strengthens our nation, our justice system and our community.

**Jury Service can be Exciting and Rewarding. Join Us in Serving Our Community. Report for Jury Service.**