



**Final Report of the
Illinois Judicial Conference
Juror Experience Task Force**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The opportunity to have one's legal matter decided by a jury of their peers is a pillar of our judicial system. But for most members of the public, the jury trial process is shrouded in mystery and misconception. A jury summons is more often viewed as an inconvenience than a privilege.

As a judicial branch, we have an obligation to litigants, jurors, and the public to examine, support, and improve the juror experience, which is different in each of Illinois' 102 counties. Jurors are more than a necessary element of the jury trial process. Jurors also serve as de facto ambassadors of the court system, a role that cannot be overlooked at a time when confidence in public institutions is waning.¹

In furtherance of the Illinois Judicial Branch's 2022-2025 Strategic Agenda², the Illinois Judicial Conference (IJC) created the Juror Experience Task Force (Task Force) in late 2023 to study and recommend ways to improve the juror experience in Illinois. Task Force members were selected for their expertise in this area. The Task Force includes criminal and civil trial court judges, criminal and civil attorneys, a professor, and jury coordinators and other court staff.

II. THE WORK OF THE TASK FORCE

The IJC charged the Task Force with studying and recommending ways to improve the juror experience in Illinois. The Task Force chose to focus its work on three areas that it identified as high priority, high impact, and accomplishable during the Task Force year: increasing jury pool diversity,³ reducing the burdens of jury service, and providing public education about the benefits of jury service.⁴ The Task Force formed three subcommittees to study and make recommendations regarding these topics. The subcommittees met regularly throughout the Task Force year, and the full Task Force reviewed, refined, and unanimously approved the subcommittee recommendations. While the Task Force was particularly focused on the petit juror experience, many of the recommendations also apply to grand jurors.

In addition to the expertise of its members, the Task Force was guided by a wealth of existing jury resources, which it encourages local courts to consult. The [National Center for State Courts' Center for Jury Studies](#) offers periodic webinars, a weekly email newsletter, and other materials. The American Bar Association recently updated its *Principles for Juries and Jury Trials*,⁵ with additional updates regarding juror safety expected soon. The Conference of State Court Administrators' December 2023 *Citizens on*

¹ In 2023, 197 jury trials were completed in Illinois outside of Cook County. Data is not presently available for Cook County.

² The Judicial Branch's 2022-2025 Strategic Agenda is available at https://www.illinoiscourts.gov/report/strategic_agenda_22-25/?page=1.

³ The terms "diversity" and "representativeness" are used interchangeably throughout this report. A diverse and representative jury is one that fairly reflects the community from which it was drawn.

⁴ Notably, the Task Force did not address the jury selection process (e.g. peremptory strikes). This is an important topic that warrants future study, but it was beyond the scope of the Task Force's charge.

⁵ https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/american_jury/principles-juries-jury-trial.pdf

*Call: Responding to the Needs of 21st Century Jurors*⁶ was a particularly instructive resource. The Task Force also benefitted from the graciousness of jury coordinators across the state, who shared their jury summonses, eligibility questionnaires, frequently asked questions, and other information.

While jury practices that are consistent across the state are desirable for many reasons, the Task Force recognizes the realities of operating a court system in a state with 102 counties ranging from extremely urban and densely populated to rural and sparsely populated. Larger counties may hold multiple concurrent jury trials each week, while smaller counties may conduct only a few jury trials a year. These differences in scale impact operations. Consequently, many of the Task Force's recommendations take the form of best practices, which the Task Force hopes will be widely adopted but allow for local variation where appropriate. That said, it is imperative that all courts be willing to reconsider their current practices and approach change with an open mind. This must be an ongoing process.

The Task Force makes nine recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Increase **juror compensation** to reduce the financial burdens on jurors and support jury pool representativeness.
- **Recommendation 2:** Support juror **safety and well-being**.
 - Adopt practices that protect juror privacy.
 - Make mental health resources available to jurors.
- **Recommendation 3:** Expand the **master juror list sources** to include recipients of benefits through the Illinois Department of Human Services (e.g., Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, AABD), to maximize the inclusiveness of the master list.
- **Recommendation 4:** The Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) should develop and make available a **model juror summons**.
- **Recommendation 5:** Counties should collect **demographic data** from prospective jurors via the qualification questionnaire.
- **Recommendation 6:** The Supreme Court should adopt and share with local courts best practices for optimizing the **juror summons process**.
 - Counties should utilize the National Change of Address (NCOA) database when preparing juror summonses.
 - Counties should employ a one-step summons process.
 - Courts should enable prospective jurors to complete questionnaires before they report for jury duty.

⁶ https://cosca.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/97251/COSCA-Citizens-on-Call.pdf?utm_campaign=451687_%40the%20Center%20January%2017%202024&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotdigital&dm_i=7L57,9OIV,4VW4J9,1DYIC,1

- Courts should collect phone numbers and email addresses from prospective jurors and send jury service reminders.
- Courts should adopt clear and progressive non-response and failure to appear practices.
- Courts should regularly review jury pool data.
- **Recommendation 7:** Update, improve, and standardize information and **educational materials** for prospective jurors.
 - Update the AOIC's petit and grand jury handbooks.
 - Share a master jury service FAQ list.
 - Engage in a social media campaign to educate the public about jury service.
 - Educate students about jury service.
- **Recommendation 8:** **Recognize and seek feedback** from jurors.
 - Adopt a statewide Juror Appreciation Week.
 - Send thank you letters to jurors.
 - Collect feedback from jurors via a juror exit survey.
- **Recommendation 9:** Create a statewide **jury coordinator group** to facilitate communication and education among jury coordinators.

III. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION 1: Increase juror compensation to reduce the financial burdens on jurors and support jury pool representativeness.

Jury service, particularly for jurors who are selected to serve on a jury, can impose a significant financial burden. Employers are not required to pay employees during jury service, forcing some jurors to take unpaid time off of work. Parking and transportation can be costly, particularly in Cook County. Some jurors must pay someone else to take care of children or other family members. While some of these jurors may qualify for a deferment or excusal from jury service due to these financial barriers, keeping these jurors in the pool helps to ensure a diverse and representative jury pool.

It is incumbent on us to seriously consider an increase in juror compensation, either directly or indirectly. By statute, minimum juror pay ranges from \$4 per day to \$10 per day depending on the county. 55 ILCS 5/4-11001. Many counties have set their juror pay slightly higher than the statutory minimum, but juror pay still does not come close to fully compensating most jurors for their out-of-pocket expenses or lost wages.

The Task Force has identified several possible paths for increasing juror compensation, including:

- Increasing the statutory minimum juror compensation in all counties to the rate of at least \$20.00 per day;

- Creating an Illinois tax credit for jurors;⁷
- Requiring employers to pay employees for the first day of jury service; and
- Increasing the maximum civil jury demand fee (currently set at \$212.50 per 705 ILCS 105/27.1b) by the sum of \$20.00, which would assist in funding an increase in juror compensation. The Task Force further recommends that jury demand fees be specifically designated for juror purposes (including, but not limited to, juror compensation), rather than allocated to the county general fund.

The Task Force recognizes that the options proposed above would require legislative action, and suggests that the General Assembly may wish to consider these and other ways to increase juror compensation.

Additionally, the Task Force recommends that all courts, including the Circuit Court of Cook County, offer juror parking at no cost to jurors. A model that does not require jurors to pay for parking out-of-pocket and later seek reimbursement is preferred. Courts should also reimburse for out-of-pocket transportation costs, and should consider providing transportation vouchers or partnering with public transportation providers where appropriate.

The Task Force notes that several Illinois counties now pay jurors via debit card. That method of payment is preferred because it is faster and more convenient than payment by check.

The Task Force recommends that these proposals regarding juror compensation be shared with local and state bar associations to pursue as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Support juror safety and well-being.

A. Adopt practices that protect juror privacy.

Jury service is overwhelmingly a safe activity. However, recent high-profile cases have created concerns about juror privacy and safety, and these perceived risks can discourage prospective jurors from responding to a jury summons. Even absent safety concerns, many jurors are uncomfortable sharing personal information in open court during the jury selection process, regardless of the nature of the case.

The Task Force recommends that the judge and other case participants routinely refer to jurors by an assigned juror number instead of by name. To avoid prejudicing prospective jurors, best practice is to employ this practice consistently in all cases, rather than selectively based on case type or the facts of a particular case. Jury questionnaires should be collected from the attorneys and parties once all jurors and alternates have been selected. Courts should provide safe ways for jurors to and from their vehicles and the courthouse, navigate the courthouse, and similar arrangements, particularly in high-profile cases or cases where juror safety may be at issue.

⁷ The Task Force engaged in preliminary discussions with lawmakers to assess the feasibility of a tax credit and believes that the General Assembly may be receptive to such a proposal.

It is important to proactively communicate these practices to jurors at multiple stages of the jury service process, including at summoning, juror orientation, and voir dire.

B. Make mental health resources available to jurors.

Jurors take time away from their day-to-day lives to engage in an unfamiliar and highly consequential process with a group of strangers. On top of that, they may be asked to consider disturbing evidence. This can be stressful and take a toll on juror mental health. Jurors should be afforded the option and opportunity to receive mental health services (similar to the Illinois Lawyers' Assistance Program), free of charge. In Lake County, for example, the court's Psychological Services Division offers jurors a free evaluation and referral for services.

Several states offer jurors brochures with resources for managing stress. Upon consultation with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts' Statewide Behavioral Health Administrator Scott Block, the Task Force recommends that the Supreme Court charge the Special Supreme Court Advisory Committee for Justice and Mental Health Planning with creating a brochure that helps link jurors to existing mental health resources.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Expand the master juror list sources to include recipients of benefits through the Illinois Department of Human Services (e.g., Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, AABD), to maximize the inclusiveness of the master list.

Jury pool representativeness begins with the master jury list, which the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) compiles and provides to counties annually. Currently the master jury list combines lists of registered voters, Illinois driver's license holders, Illinois Identification Card holders, Illinois Person with a Disability Identification Card holders, and claimants for unemployment insurance. 705 ILCS 305/1. To maximize the inclusiveness of the master list, the Task Force recommends expanding the master list sources to include recipients of benefits through the Illinois Department of Human Services, which administers programs including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD). This expansion would require an amendment to the Jury Act, 705 ILCS 305 et seq.

The AOIC should continue to update and provide the master list to counties annually, and to annually review the master list to remove duplicates.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Supreme Court and the AOIC should develop and make available a model juror summons.

The Task Force recommends that the Supreme Court and the AOIC contract with an expert to create a model juror summons, which should be made available to local courts. Currently, each county creates its own juror summons and chooses what the summons looks like and what information is included. Almost all of the summonses across the state use unfamiliar legal terms, include an overwhelming amount of information, and lack white space, all of which make the summons challenging to read and understand.

Ensuring that all individuals who are called upon to serve will answer the call is key to ensuring jury pool diversity. A lack of clear and concise information on the juror summons deters participation. The juror

summons should inform a prospective juror how to respond to the summons, including the information they need to provide to register as a juror, how and when to appear in court, and how to contact the relevant source if they need help or more information. This should be done using plain language and in a format that supports readability and emphasizes the most important information.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Counties should collect demographic data from prospective jurors via the qualification questionnaire.

Currently each county creates its own juror qualification questionnaire. As a result, each county asks different questions and collects different data, and very few counties collect demographic data from prospective jurors.

The Task Force recommends that all counties collect demographic data related to race, ethnicity, gender, and age via the juror qualification questionnaire. The collection of such data will demonstrate the Illinois Judicial Branch's commitment to ensuring jury pool representativeness, and will equip courts with data necessary to assess jury pool composition and continually improve the summoning process. Without such data, it is impossible to meaningfully assess the effectiveness of efforts to achieve jury pool representativeness. The importance of collecting demographic data is highlighted in the February 2024 article from the Berkeley Law Death Penalty Clinic [Guess Who's Coming to Jury Duty: How the Failure to Collect Juror Demographic Data Contributes to Whitewashing the Jury Box](#).

Specifically, the Task Force recommends:

- Data should be collected in a uniform manner across the state, requiring prospective jurors to self-identify their race, ethnicity, age, and gender. For race and ethnicity, the questions should use the same categories and definitions used in the U.S. Census. The recommended demographic questions should be included in the model juror summons referenced in [Recommendation 4](#).
- The demographic questions should be accompanied by language advising the prospective juror that the requested information is not used to determine juror qualification, but to help ensure a representative cross-section of the community.
- Demographic data should be made available to counsel for the parties prior to the commencement of jury selection.
- Trial courts should annually report aggregate demographic data to the AOIC. Trial courts and the AOIC should regularly review the collected demographic data.

⁸ Using Behavioral Science to (Re)Design Your Jury Summons and Other Communications with Prospective Jurors, originally presented on August 21, 2024. Recording available at <https://vimeo.com/1006239348?share=copy>.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Supreme Court should adopt and share with local courts best practices for optimizing the juror summons process.

The Task Force encourages courts to adopt the following best practices, which are intended to support jury pool representativeness and to reduce the burden on prospective jurors.

A. Counties should utilize the National Change of Address (NCOA) database when preparing juror summonses.

Even when the master juror list is updated annually as required, the list will inevitably include stale and incorrect addresses resulting in summonses that are undeliverable, misdelivered, or delayed. This is especially true for populations that move frequently.

Counties should consider utilizing the National Change of Address (NCOA) database when preparing and mailing juror questionnaires and summonses. The NCOA is a secure dataset of approximately 160 million permanent change-of-address (COA) records constructed from names and addresses of individuals, families, and businesses who have filed a change-of-address with the US Postal Service. Utilizing the NCOA when summonses are prepared and mailed will result in more summonses being timely delivered to the intended recipient. While there is a cost (which varies by vendor) to utilize the NCOA, this cost should be offset by decreased printing and postage costs associated with undeliverable summonses.

B. Counties should employ a one-step summons process.

There are two approaches to summoning jurors: a one-step process where the qualification and summons processes are combined into a single step, and a two-step process where juror qualification is determined first and then only qualified jurors are summoned. Illinois does not mandate either approach, so both the one-step and two-step approaches are currently in use in Illinois.

Nationally, courts that combine qualification and summoning in a single step typically experience jury yields 10 to 15 percentage points higher than courts that use a two-step process to qualify and then summon jurors. This is largely because a one-step process eliminates an opportunity to “lose” prospective jurors between the qualification step and the summons step.⁹ Printing and postage costs are also reduced with a one-step process since the qualification questionnaire and summons are combined into a single mailing.

The Task Force recommends that counties employ a one-step juror summons process, combining the initial juror qualification questionnaire with a summons to report on a specific date.

⁹ *Assessing and Achieving Jury Pool Representativeness*, by Judge William Caprathe (ret.), Paula Hannaford-Agor, Stephanie McCoy Loquvam, and Shari Seidman Diamond. *Judges’ Journal*, Vol. 55 No. 2, 2016.

C. Courts should enable prospective jurors to complete questionnaires before they report for jury duty.

Courts should request prospective jurors to complete both initial qualification and case specific questionnaires prior to reporting for jury duty. Where possible, questionnaires should be provided to the judge and attorneys at the final pre-trial or at least two days before trial. This will enable the court to identify and notify prospective jurors who are ineligible to serve or who can be stricken for cause before they report to the courthouse. This saves time and expense for both the prospective juror and the court. Prospective jurors who fail to complete the questionnaires in advance should be allowed to complete them at the courthouse on their reporting day.

Courts should encourage responses by allowing prospective jurors to complete the questionnaires in hard copy or electronically. Electronic responses could be collected through a system such as iJuror or a locally developed system or secure form, including widely available and low-cost tools such as Microsoft or Google forms or Survey Monkey.¹⁰

D. Courts should collect phone numbers and email addresses from prospective jurors and send jury service reminders.

Courts should collect prospective juror phone numbers and email addresses through the juror registration process. This information should be used to send jury service reminders and to notify prospective jurors of deferrals, excusals, and dismissals in advance where possible. Prospective jurors should be given the opportunity to choose their preferred contact methods. Research has shown that reminders have a significant effect on response rates. Jurors who receive reminders shortly before the date when they are to appear in court are more likely to appear in court that day.

E. Courts should adopt clear and progressive non-response and failure to appear practices.

The Task Force recommends that local non-response and failure to appear practices be guided by a minimum of two additional notices sent at two-month intervals, before the court sends a notice to appear to give a reason for failure to appear with the possibility of court sanctions.

Lake County recently implemented a successful failure to appear model. After the first and second failures to appear, a new summons is issued with a report date two months in the future. On a third failure to appear, a notice to appear is issued requiring the juror to appear in court to give reason why they failed to appear and face possible sanctions. This progressive model is sensitive to the myriad reasons a juror may fail to respond to a juror summons, while providing consequences for repeated failures to appear and giving weight to the importance of jury service.

F. Courts should regularly review jury pool data.

Courts should regularly review jury pool data to assess jury pool representativeness, nonresponse rates, undeliverable rates, and juror utilization rates, and make appropriate and responsive changes to local practices.

¹⁰ Streamlining Jury Selection: The Power of Remote Case-Specific Juror Questionnaires, presented September 5, 2024. Recording available at <https://vimeo.com/1007729187?share=copy>.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Update, improve, and standardize information and educational materials for prospective jurors.

A. Update the AOIC's petit and grand jury handbooks.

The AOIC produces petit and grand jury “handbooks,” trifold pamphlets which many courts send to prospective jurors along with the juror summons and are also available on the Illinois Courts website. These handbooks are excellent resources, but the Task Force found that the amount of included information and use of legal terms can be overwhelming to a prospective juror who has not yet even reported for duty. The Task Force recommends revisions to these handbooks to streamline the information included and to incorporate more plain language.

The Task Force also recommends a graphic redesign of the handbooks to increase readability. Space should be available on each handbook for courts to add contact and other local information.

B. Share a master jury service FAQ list.

Prospective jurors have many questions upon receiving a juror summons. These range from the existential (why is jury service important?) to the mundane (where do I park when I report?). A master Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list addressing these common questions would help answer prospective juror questions, while potentially reducing the number of calls to courts and the amount of information that must be included on the summons. The Task Force recommends that local courts post these FAQs prominently on their websites and provide a link to the location of the FAQs on the juror summons.

The Task Force collected and reviewed existing FAQ lists from local courts to create a master statewide FAQ list. The master list can be shared with courts throughout the state and adapted locally.

C. Engage in a social media campaign to educate the public about jury service.

Most people know very little about jury service, but they believe it is long, boring, and inconvenient. The Task Force recommends that the Supreme Court/AOIC pursue an engaging and digestible social media campaign to educate the public about jury service. This might include short videos or social media posts highlighting “fun facts” or “facts vs. myths” (e.g., Did you know that Oprah Winfrey served as a juror in Chicago for a murder trial in 2004?). The purpose would be to educate the public about the importance of jury service, and to dispel misconceptions about jury service.

D. Educate students about jury service.

Many bar associations and other groups engage with schools to educate students about the court system. Education about jury trials and jury service should be explicitly included in this outreach to highlight the important role of juries and frame jury service positively as a privilege and civic duty.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Recognize and seek feedback from jurors.

A. Adopt a statewide Juror Appreciation Week.

We cannot sustain an effective jury system without jurors. The Task Force recommends that the Court recognize a statewide Jury Appreciation Week. In addition to thanking jurors for their service, a jury appreciation week is also an opportunity to educate the public about the jury system and the importance of jurors. This may include social media posts and videos about jury service, juror appreciation events held at local courthouses, op-eds or letters to the editor in local newspapers, or presentations to school groups. The Task Force suggests adopting the week of Law Day as Juror Appreciation Week, since many courts and bar associations are already engaged in outreach to the public during this period.

B. Send thank you letters to jurors.

Many courts already send thank you letters to jurors, and the Task Force recommends that all courts adopt this practice. One letter is intended for all jurors upon completion of their service. This letter could be sent on behalf of the jury coordinator or the chief judge. The other letter is intended for jurors who are actually selected for and serve on a jury. This letter should be on the letterhead of the judge who presided over the trial and personally signed by the judge.

C. Collect feedback from jurors via a juror exit survey.

Jurors should be asked to provide timely feedback about their experience. This information can be used to improve the juror experience and the jury trial process.

The survey should be available in both hard copy and electronically (through widely available tools such as Microsoft or Google Forms or Survey Monkey), and jurors should be given multiple opportunities to complete the survey (e.g., include the link and a hard copy with the juror thank you letter, send the link via text message, include a QR code in the jury assembly room).

RECOMMENDATION 9: Create a statewide jury coordinator group to facilitate communication and education among jury coordinators.

Jury coordinators play a critical role in shaping the juror experience. They process deferral and excusal requests and answer confused phone calls from prospective jurors who received a juror summons in the mail, among other tasks. In many counties, “jury coordinator” is just one of several court administration functions that person performs.

Despite the importance of the role, there is no statewide group for jury coordinators as there is for circuit clerks and trial court administrators. The Task Force recommends that the AOIC create and support a jury coordinator email listserv, so that jury coordinators can share best practices, troubleshoot problems, and exchange ideas. It may also be beneficial to convene jury coordinators for periodic virtual meetings to support ongoing education, informational updates, and networking.

IV. TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Continue to study procedures for challenging a jury pool.

Currently, there is little recourse for attorneys and litigants when a jury pool does not represent the community from which it was drawn. The Task Force recommends that the Court form a new committee, reconfigure the Juror Experience Task Force, or assign an existing committee such as the Committee on Equal Justice to continue to study and make recommendations regarding jury pool challenges.

The Task Force reviewed 725 ILCS 5/114-3, the statute governing motions to discharge a jury panel in criminal cases. The statute allows a motion attacking the process in which a jury panel has been selected or drawn (for example, if the juror summons process did not follow the law), but it does not provide a remedy for underrepresentation in a venire absent a defect in the summons process. There is no civil corollary to the criminal statute.

The Task Force did not feel that it had adequate time to fully study this issue, but believes that a clear process for challenging the representativeness of a jury pool in both criminal and civil cases is a key aspect of ensuring jury pool diversity. The Task Force recommends that judges and attorneys experienced in jury pool challenges be involved in any further study of this topic.

2. Examine and consider revision of the language of the Jury Act.

The Task Force notes that the language of the Jury Act, 705 ILCS 305 *et seq.*, regarding juror qualification warrants examination. Specifically, 705 ILCS 305/2(a)(3) provides that jurors must be “Free from all legal exception, of fair character, of approved integrity, of sound judgment, [and] well informed....” This highly subjective language is vague and open to substantial differences in interpretation, and potentially confuses the distinction between for cause strikes and peremptory strikes.

V. CONCLUSION

The Task Force is grateful to the Illinois Supreme Court and the Illinois Judicial Conference for recognizing the importance of this topic and the opportunity to study the juror experience. However, the work is not done. Improving the juror experience must be an ongoing effort undertaken at all levels of the judicial branch, and with the support of the General Assembly and county boards. The Task Force believes that its recommendations provide a foundation to improve the juror experience, and by extension the jury trial process, across the state.