



Michael J. McAllister, Esquire
Jury Selection Commissioner

ORGANIZATION & PURPOSE

The importance of public Access to justice is nowhere more evident than in the work of the Jury Selection Commission. Each day, under the direction of Jury Commissioner, Michael J. McAllister, Esquire, the Philadelphia County Jury Selection Commission provides access for approximately 400 prospective jurors who serve more than ninety Criminal and Civil Trial Judges throughout the First Judicial District. Along with the Commissioner and staff, Jury Selection officers, clerks, technicians and managers strive to respectfully and courteously provide access to the Court, to the greatest extent possible, for Philadelphia citizens participating in Jury Service.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Within the framework of a one day/one trial system, the Commission mails questionnaires and qualifies and summons prospective jurors through more than 600,000 pieces of mail annually. The result: at least 100,000 citizens gain access to the judicial process each year. The Commission also accommodates jurors in the Assembly Room; tracks juror status throughout proceedings in civil and criminal courtrooms; and processes and distributes jury fee checks to participants at the conclusion of their service. While efficiencies continue to reduce criminal and civil case inventories, the demand for jury trials has nonetheless remained constant. Paying nine dollars per day, jury fees disbursed averaged \$1.5 million annually.

ACHIEVEMENTS

New Accommodations: Formerly located in City Hall, the Jury Selection Commission moved to the current headquarters at the Criminal Justice Center in September 1995. This move, just prior to the beginning of the 1996-1997 biennial report period, generated opportunities to furnish prospective jurors improved access to the Court system through accommodations built for just that purpose. Located in Criminal Justice Center Room 101, the new Jury Assembly Room is easily accessible, barrier free, smoke-free, and comfortably furnished for prospective jurors. An orientation video — “Welcome to Jury Duty” — is available on eleven recessed video monitors so that jurors can learn their integral role in the administration and dispensation of justice. Jurors’ Lounge amenities include vending machines, telephones, water fountains, and expanded restroom facilities. These facilities are vastly improved over those at the former Commission headquarters in City Hall. Desktop PC’s and upgraded office and communications equipment support staff in providing improved quality of service to jurors, other Court agencies and Philadelphia citizens.

Jury Committee Formed: A Judicial Jury Selection Committee has been empaneled to examine issues including juror appreciation, improved automation and technology, effective juror utilization, and methods of promoting juror response. Chaired by Judge Richard Klein, this committee cultivates better communication between the Philadelphia Jury Commissioner, the Judiciary, Court Administration, various Philadelphia Court agencies, and Jury Commissioners from surrounding

jurisdictions. The Committee developed and supported innovative recommendations for improved access to justice for jurors.

Meet the Judges Program: Judge Marvin Halbert, long known to be sensitive to jurors and their contributions, coordinates another successful juror access initiative. In this very successful program, volunteer Judges welcome prospective jurors in the Assembly Room. Jurors have responded favorably to the opportunity to meet judges. Jurors are better oriented to the proceedings and their duties, and more comfortable with the experience. Arguably, these improvements enhance the quality of justice while increasing accessibility.

Expanding Access: For 24-hour access to information, an Automated Voice Mail system conveys general information and answers the most commonly asked questions pertaining to jury questionnaire and summonses. The Internet page titled “Jury Duty in Philadelphia County Courts” under the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Courts On-Line relays information on jury selection and service.

In accordance with the American Disabilities Act of 1990, the Commission works to ensure that qualified individuals with physical disabilities have access to all reasonable and available accommodations essential for their opportunity to effectively serve as jurors.