

Community Comment  
9/23/16  
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### New Jury System

I've lived a long time in Humboldt County. I have had the pleasure and the privilege to serve on many commissions and boards. A big part of the reason I chose to live in our neck of the woods is we can be as involved as we like in local politics and issues and solutions. I know many of you listening feel the same way. While we have different opinions about how to deal with any given issue, the fact that we can get our two cents into the discussion is important for us and the community. No one has all the answers nor does one side of the political spectrum hold the key to the solution. We find out, most of the time, that there are many ways to solve a problem and the solutions get better as we share our ideas.

For all the years that I have been eligible to serve on a jury, I have never been selected. Often, when the attorneys find out I was a councilmember, one side or the other is happy to excuse me. They think, I guess, that I will favor the prosecution because I had to work with police officers and know their job. After my own experience with the legal system, I have come to the opinion that the District Attorney has an extraordinary unfair advantage over the defendant. They have virtually unlimited resources and can charge anything they think they can without consequences. They can refuse to even interview you if they feel they have the information they need to press a charge. Having had this experience, I wasn't selected for one jury because I expressed this opinion.

I still get called regularly for jury duty. It has always been a frustrating process to sit through. How many times have I've seen the movie that they show? O.K., I know this is difficult to manage and I will admit that I haven't come up with a better approach. But the latest process is worth complaining about.

It used to be that the jury summons was for a specific date. You called the night before to see if your group would still need to gather to select a jury for some specific case. This is cumbersome but it works. You have one day to have to get off work or other commitments with the possibility that you may serve on a trial of some length. But this new system is unworkable for normal people with normal lives.

Now you call the night before on a specific date to see if you need to come to the court house the next morning. But, if not, you have to call the next night and the next and the next for the same possibility. This means you have four or five days you have no idea about your schedule. I have my own business and this process is difficult to manage. I don't know how an employee can reasonably work this out with an employer.

Serving on a jury is a privilege. In many ways it is the essence of our democracy. We are a country of laws. People charged with breaking a law have a right to be judged by their peers; ordinary people in their community. We all need to step up to the plate and do our

duty. What we deserve in return is to have a process that invites this civic duty in as reasonable a way as possible. This new system is not it.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.