

STATE OF MICHIGAN LAW DAY 2005 ESSAY CONTEST
“THE AMERICAN JURY: WE THE PEOPLE IN ACTION”

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Should all citizens be willing to serve as jurors?

Is it Just? Jury Duty in the U.S.A.

Suppose that many people received letters saying that they would have to serve as jurors. Should all citizens be willing to serve? Yes, all eligible citizens should be willing to serve as jurors.

Being on a jury can be very demanding. Some difficult things about being a juror are that you only get paid a small amount each day, and you may have to leave your job and family, sometimes for a very long time. Another challenging thing is that you may not be in touch with world events at all if the court decides to sequester the jury. People with children or jobs that need a lot of preparation (like teachers) are severely impacted by such long sequestering. Being a juror can also be rewarding because you perform a good deed for your country. You help put the people who break the law in jail, and help people who obey laws to go back home. You get a voice in our democracy when you are on a jury.

It is our duty to serve; it is every citizen's responsibility. When everyone is willing to serve as a juror, justice is maintained within the court system. Think of it this way, if the only people that could be on the jury were jury specialists, then many types of people would not get a voice in the law. America is a diverse nation and her juries should reflect that diversity to best provide justice. If only a small population of people serve as jurors, they may not have the best interests of everyone in mind.

While it is important for all to be willing to serve, jurors should not be sequestered for long periods of time when deciding cases. In effect, this is locking innocent people up. They cannot have contact with loved ones or even hear the news. In the case of Sheppard v Maxwell, 384 U.S. 333 (1966), the jurors observed the trial for over seven weeks and were locked up for five days deciding the case. Supposedly, their decision was not influenced by anyone or anything. However, they did communicate by phone while the bailiff listened to the jurists' ends of the conversations. In the end, the defense council questioned their court verdict claiming that outside influence may have occurred. The U. S. Supreme Court decided that the jurors' decision should not stand, as the jurors could have been influenced by contact with people outside of court.

Our nation believes that that the jury is a very good thing, and that everyone should take a turn serving on a jury. As Justice Antonin Scalia stated during the case of Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466 (2000) “The Founders of the American Republic were not prepared to leave [criminal intent decisions to judges], which is why the jury-trial guarantee was one of the least controversial provisions of the Bill of Rights.”

It's a sad fact that sometimes you have to endure separations and discomfort, as happened to jurors in the Sheppard v. Maxwell case. But, as citizens of the United States we have wonderful rights that give us more freedom than most countries in the world. To maintain those freedoms, we must be willing to take the responsibility to participate in the judicial branch of our government as jurors.