

WHAT THE COURT EXPECTS OF YOU

Jury service may be the most serious obligation of citizenship. Because being a juror is such an important responsibility, jurors are expected to act in ways which promote fair decisions. The following comments may assist and guide jurors:

- Jurors must be in court on time; a trial cannot go forward until all jurors are present.
- When the court is in session and the jurors are in the courtroom, a juror should not talk with fellow members of the jury or with anyone else.
- A juror should pay close attention to what the judge, attorneys and witnesses say. If a juror cannot hear, the juror should raise a hand and, when called on, tell the judge the problem.
- Jurors may not take notes without the permission of the judge. This is true even if the trial is long or involved and some jurors might feel it would help.
- A juror must keep an open mind throughout the trial. Jurors must not form any final opinion about the case being tried or talk to fellow jurors about the case until all the evidence has been presented and the judge has given the instruction on the law. At that point, the jury goes to the jury room to discuss the evidence and decide the case.
- Jurors must not discuss the trial with anyone. Generally, juries in Vermont are not sequestered--that is, separated from friends and family--and jurors may return to their homes and workplaces when the trial is not in session. While this is more convenient for jurors, it places a responsibility on them to avoid outside influences. Friends and family may naturally inquire about the trial, but jurors must not discuss the case with anyone until after the trial is over.
- Jurors must not read newspaper articles or listen to radio or television accounts of the trial. Even if they are accurate, these stories are only brief summaries which may stress some items and underplay others. More seriously, they may refer to matters which were not or cannot be admitted in the case as evidence.
- Jurors should ask the court officer to tell the judge if anyone tries to contact them about the trial.
- Any juror who discovers during the trial that they have personal knowledge or a connection with the case should ask the court officer to tell the judge immediately. The judge will decide if the juror should be excused.
- The judge or the court officer should be told immediately of any emergency that could affect a juror's ability to carry out the juror's duty.
- Jurors should not try to learn from any source outside of the courtroom anything about the case being tried. Jurors should not, on their own, visit any place being discussed at the trial or undertake any investigation of the case. If the judge believes a visit to the site is appropriate, arrangements will be made for the whole jury to visit.