

# PRESS RELEASE



## *SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF IMPERIAL*

*RELEASE DATE: August 19, 2015*

### **Ignoring Jury Duty May Result in Fines**

Imperial County, CA – The Superior Court of California, County of Imperial today announced the beginning of a tougher new program to round up persons who willfully fail to respond to their jury summons, thereby enforcing the penalties that California law allows for those refusing to serve.

Court Executive Officer and Jury Commissioner, Tammy L. Grimm, stated: “The Court’s goal is to ensure that jury service is shared by all eligible citizens of Imperial County, as mandated by the State Legislature. Trial by jury is a cherished constitutional right and jury service is an obligation of citizenship. It is only fair that the obligation be shared by all citizens, not just those who faithfully answer the call to serve.”

California has made jury service much easier in recent years with the one-day or one-trial program. Unfortunately, Imperial County has one of the lowest juror and response rates in the entire state. It is not uncommon for the Court to send out 1300 summons, with only 30% or less appearing or answering the notice.

Experience has shown that many citizens simply do not understand how important their service is to the smooth functioning of the jury system, and many who initially fail to appear ultimately make perfectly good jurors and end up enjoying their service, feeling they gave back to the community.

Given the number of trials in Imperial County as of late, and the need to increase the pool of potential jurors, the Court must now focus on tracking down prospective jurors who ignore their summonses to report for duty. Although offered numerous chances to report or explain why they cannot serve, many residents continue to discard or ignore their jury summons. Yet, California law allows judges to fine or even jail jurors who refuse to serve, and judges in Imperial County are toughening up on enforcement of these penalties.

Therefore, under the Court's new program, citizens who fail to appear for jury service may be held in contempt of court, which is punishable by fine and/or incarceration. Or the court may impose reasonable monetary sanctions in lieu of a finding of contempt.

If a person does not respond to the initial jury summons, the court will send a second notice. If the summoned juror does not respond to that second summons, then the juror will be served with an order stating that the non-responsive juror must come to court to appear before a Judge at an Order to Show Cause hearing regarding why he or she should not be fined. Should a person fail to appear at the hearing, the court will issue a warrant for his or her arrest.

When the first jury summons arrives, the Court urges recipients of the notice to respond. If the summonsed juror has a valid reason for postponing service or a legal reason to be excused, the reason can be written on the summons in the blanks provided and mailed back to the Court.

"The Court's goal is to gain compliance rather than sanction non-responsible jurors and to impress upon local citizens the importance of jury duty. The more jurors reporting for jury duty, the less frequently jurors will be called for service, the faster trials can move forward, and the better our system of justice will operate," CEO/Court Jury Commissioner Grimm stated. "We all live in a justice system that permits a jury of our peers. We need to have a sufficient pool of all qualified residents to ensure that this right is being protected during trials."

For more information, please contact Court Administration at (760) 482-2250.