

# Superior Court of the State of Washington For Chelan County

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## ***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

**CHELAN COUNTY, September 8, 2020.** Chelan County Superior Court will resume jury trials September 15, 2020, after pausing them in April of 2020 pursuant to an order from the state Supreme Court in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This meant that a very large number of felony criminal trials were put on hold over the past three and a half months, creating a backlog of trials and causing many defendants to wait for their right to have their case heard by a jury.

The suspension of jury trials was needed to protect the health of court users and court staff. This pause provided us the opportunity to redesign our jury processes with the input of public health officials. However, now it is critical that we restart jury trials, which are key to the fair administration of justice. Jury service is a vital civic duty. The Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article One, Section 22 of the Washington State Constitution provide the right to every criminal defendant to have a trial by a jury. The justice system depends on the service of the citizens of this County to uphold a defendant's constitutional rights.

Extensive new safety precautions have been implemented to protect juror safety and public health as trials resume to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Judges, attorneys, court staff, and public health officials worked together over many weeks to establish new safety procedures and guidelines so that we can safely resume jury trials.

New jury processes include:

1. Jurors will report at staggered times on the first day of trial so that no more than 16 potential jurors will be present in the jury assembly room or courtroom at one time. The courtroom can accommodate approximately 16 jurors at a time taking into consideration appropriate social distancing.
2. All jurors and potential jurors are required to wear masks in the courtroom.
3. Attorneys, parties, and witnesses are also required to wear masks in the courtroom unless actively speaking as a part of the trial process. Anyone actively speaking without a mask will be required to be at least six feet away from other persons.
4. Court staff and judges will either be wearing masks or have a plexiglass shield around them.

5. Each group of jurors will be questioned by the attorneys for each side and then excused with instructions that they will be notified later that day as to whether they have been selected and when to return.
6. Once the jury is selected, the jurors will be spread out throughout the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing occurs. This means that jurors will be seated in the benches which are typically used by spectators because the jury box is not large enough to accommodate the social distancing requirements.
7. The normal jury room used for breaks will be used by only one half of the jurors and the other half will be placed in the second jury room for all breaks.
8. Jury deliberation will occur in one of the courtrooms to ensure the jury has sufficient space to spread out during deliberations.
9. Proper sanitization will occur after each individual use of any table, chair, microphone, pens, or any other item used by individuals in the jury selection process.

Chelan County Superior Court remains committed to the safety of our jurors and the public. The Court will hold people strictly accountable to the requirements of both masking and social distancing. It is incredibly important that everyone understand our justice system needs jury trials to resume and these safety requirements are necessary to make that happen while protecting the community.

It is critical for potential jurors to respond to summonses! We appreciate your willingness to participate in this most important civic role by serving on jury duty.

For more information, see our FAQs and other details on our web site at <https://www.co.chelan.wa.us/superior-court>. If you have additional questions or concerns about jury service, you can contact the Jury Administrator.

**CONTACT:**

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