



Everything Michigan

## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Serving on a jury is important duty for citizens

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By Judge Joe Skocelas

The Michigan Supreme Court has designated July as Jury Appreciation Month to honor and thank all those who participate in jury duty and to highlight the role of jury service in our democracy.

The right to a trial by jury is central to our democracy. It was the colonists' loss of that right that helped spark the Revolutionary War. Colonists knew the jury was a safeguard against possible governmental tyranny and oppression. The jury system provides a balance of the power of the government with the power of the local community. The right to a trial by jury is now enshrined in both our United States and Michigan constitutions.

Despite the historical background of jury service, very often the first thought in the mind of a citizen who receives a summons for jury duty in the mail is: "How can I get out of this?" Admittedly, jury service does involve a sacrifice of time and convenience.

However, by law an employer cannot discipline an employee who is summoned for jury duty, even for lengthy periods of time. If a potential juror has a compelling reason that makes it difficult to attend on their scheduled dates, we make reasonable efforts to reschedule their service dates. However, it is essential to our system of justice that citizens answer their call to jury service.

As I always tell jurors before a jury trial begins, "Jury service is one of the most important duties members of a free society are asked to perform." All persons involved in criminal or civil cases have the right to have a jury of their fellow citizens hear and decide their cases. The decisions juries make have a direct impact on the quality of life for the rest of us in the community. Despite their initial apprehension when receiving a summons for jury duty, after the trial has been completed, jurors consistently tell me they enjoyed their experience.

During July, we join the Michigan Supreme Court in celebrating the duty and privilege of jury service. If you are called to serve as a juror, rather than regarding it as a personal inconvenience, consider it the chance to personally participate in one of the cornerstones of American democracy.

Joe Skocelas is a judge for the 57th District Court in Allegan County.

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