

## Court Information Release



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS  
EASTERN DIVISION  
219 SOUTH DEARBORN STREET  
CHICAGO, IL 60604

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### **FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT SEEKS TO IMPROVE JURY DIVERSITY**

CHICAGO – Every two years, the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois generates a pool of qualified prospective jurors for civil and criminal trials. With its twenty-two authorized district judgeships, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois is the third largest district court in the nation. The Court’s current caseload includes more than 12,000 new civil cases filed and more than 900 new felony criminal defendants annually.

In the past, prospective jurors were randomly selected from lists of registered voters. Under former Chief Judge James F. Holderman’s leadership, the Court, in June 2012, approved a change to its Jury Plan to include the use of Illinois Secretary of State records as an additional source of juror names. Current Chief Judge Rubén Castillo has instituted the new procedures and approved the mailing of over 34,000 qualifying questionnaires to a random set of potential jurors, representing a wider cross-section of the community without regard to race, gender, national origin, age or political affiliation.

In order to comply with the Jury Selection and Service Act of 1968, federal courts must send out qualifying questionnaires to a proportional number of registered voters in each county or political subdivision. The Northern District of Illinois stretches across 18 counties from the southernmost point in La Salle County to the westernmost point in Jo Davies County at the Iowa border, an area of nearly 10,100 square miles, with a total population of nearly 9.3 million persons. These counties are divided into the Eastern and Western Divisions of the Northern District of Illinois.

Chief Judge Rubén Castillo explained, “A trial by jury is one of the most important rights guaranteed by our Constitution, and serving as a juror is one of the most significant and satisfying responsibilities of citizenship. Our federal jurors help resolve some of the most significant controversies that are litigated in our court. We hope our new changes in the structure of our juror selection help a wider segment of our community experience this important service to our district.” The Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees a criminal defendant the right to trial by an impartial jury.

Clerk of Court Thomas G. Bruton stated, “A diverse jury pool is important in order to maintain public confidence in the criminal justice system. In order to achieve a jury pool that reflects the population of the District, it is important to receive responses from all of the prospective jurors who received qualifying questionnaires.”

Mr. Bruton also announced that the Clerk’s Office will start keeping closer track of the response rate from economically challenged communities, which should ultimately assist in the selection of a diverse jury pool. New Chief Judge Rubén Castillo will also start a public outreach program that will explain the value of jury service. It is hoped that all of these refinements and improvements will positively change the overall composition of the jury pool in the Northern District of Illinois.

In order to make it easier for the public to respond, the Northern District of Illinois now allows prospective jurors to use the E-Juror program to complete the questionnaires on-line or through their mobile devices. Clerk of Court Bruton explained that “the E-Juror program will save prospective jurors time and saves significant taxpayer money. If you complete the form electronically, you do not have to send it back to the court through the mail.” Using E-juror also allows prospective jurors to update personal information, check when they may need to report for jury service, submit a request for an excuse or deferral, and select an alternative time to serve, should they be summoned.

Whether prospective jurors complete the document on paper or on-line, by law, they must respond to the request by the deadline established by the Court. The law provides that a person who fails to complete a jury questionnaire will be required to come to the courthouse to provide the requested information. A prospective juror who fails to respond to a notice is subject to a fine of \$1,000, imprisonment for up to three days, or both. 28 U.S.C. §1864(b).

For further information about jury service or federal court, please visit our website: [www.ilnd.uscourts.gov](http://www.ilnd.uscourts.gov).