

**Written Comments Submitted by Texas Watch to the
Texas House Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence**

October 12, 2022

Topic: Jury Service

Chairman Leach and Members of the Committee:

I submit these comments on behalf of Texas Watch, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that has advocated for consumers and our courts for over 20 years, in reference to the committee's charge on jury service.

The jury is our smallest and most local form of government. The Founders entrusted juries to hold power to account and enforce the rule of law in our country. Citizens from every walk of life are given this awesome responsibility; it is a hallmark of what makes America great.

The right to trial by jury is enshrined in the Sixth and Seventh Amendments to the United States Constitution. The Texas Declaration of Independence decried the government for "fail[ing] and refus[ing] to secure, on a firm basis, the right of trial by jury, that palladium of civil liberty, and only safe guarantee for the life, liberty, and property of the citizen." Article I, Section 15 of the Texas Constitution states: "The right of trial by jury shall remain inviolate."

Juries protect us, and the communities they serve, every day. They carefully weigh the evidence and apply the facts to the law, without bias and free from coercion or undue influence.

For the legitimacy of our courts, and our system of self-government, it is paramount that juries reflect the communities they serve. Our republic is based on the value of representation, and that extends throughout the government, including our juries.

The public policy of this state should facilitate broad participation in jury service, not restrict it. Hardships should be eased for employees if they are picked to serve on a jury; this can be accomplished through paid leave. Mileage reimbursement is especially important for those on fixed incomes or making minimum wage. Jurors should receive fair compensation from the government for the painstaking work they perform each day in maintaining our system of ordered liberty.

The founders of our state and our country understood the importance of the jury. We hope the principles and proposals above can inform the committee in its important work. Please consider us a resource.

Respectfully submitted,
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Texas Watch
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