

DISTRICT COURT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
OF THE UNITED STATES



CHAMBERS OF
WILMA A. LEWIS
CHIEF JUDGE

Almeric L. Christian Federal Building
and United States Courthouse
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October 29, 2020

Dear Members of the Jury Panel,

On behalf of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, I want to begin by thanking you in advance for responding to the Court's summons to participate in the jury selection process. Without members of our community performing this important responsibility of citizenship, the American system of justice—with its guarantee in the United States Constitution to the right of trial by jury—could not function as intended. Your service is, therefore, vital to the proper administration of justice.

As we are all painfully aware, this year the Coronavirus Disease ("COVID-19") has presented serious public health concerns worldwide, including here in the Virgin Islands. In the wake of this pandemic—and because of the Court's concern for the well-being of jury trial participants and the public at large—we suspended all jury trials starting in mid-March of this year. Thus, for the past over seven months, the Court has been carefully monitoring the COVID-19 situation both locally and nationally to determine when it might be sufficiently safe to resume jury trials. We have now decided that, in light of circumstances as they currently exist, we can resume such trials in November 2020. However, because we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over and that you might have some concerns about reporting for jury service while the public health threat posed by COVID-19 still exists, we wanted to inform you of the preventive measures that the Court is taking to help safeguard your health and well-being.

The Court's decision to resume jury trials starting in November 2020 came only after careful consideration of the current circumstances. Ultimately, we decided that we can now resume jury trials with appropriate precautions in place in view of: (1) the information provided by the Virgin Islands Department of Health ("VIDOH") in its daily reports of COVID-19 cases in the Virgin Islands for September and October 2020, which show a marked decline in new COVID-19 cases and in the percentage of positive tests in the Virgin Islands; (2) the activities that are now permissible in the Virgin Islands, as announced by the Governor of the Virgin Islands effective October 12, 2020; and (3) the Court's ability to implement the precautionary measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") and VIDOH.

The precautionary measures that will be implemented by the Court at the Almeric L. Christian Federal Building and Courthouse on St. Croix and the Ron de Lugo Federal Building and Courthouse on St. Thomas (collectively "Federal Buildings") are as follows:

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- All persons entering the Federal Buildings will be required to wear a face covering or mask that covers the wearer's nose and mouth—with the only exceptions being for persons who provide documentation that they are unable for medical reasons to wear a face covering, and for children under the age of two years old.
- A face covering or mask will also be required while in the courtrooms, all court spaces, and in all other common areas of the Federal Buildings, including the entrance areas, lobbies, balconies, public corridors, elevators, restrooms, and stairwells.
- Witnesses will be required to wear a face covering or mask as they enter and leave the courtroom. Although they will not wear a face covering or mask while testifying, a plexiglass shield has been installed around each witness box as a precautionary measure.
- Temperature checks will be conducted of all prospective jurors.
- Social distancing—which requires that individuals maintain at least a six-foot distance from each other—will be required in all common areas of the Federal Buildings, including all court spaces.
- The arrival time for prospective jurors will be staggered to facilitate social distancing during the screening process at the entrances of the Federal Buildings.
- The check-in process, jury orientation, jury selection, and jury trial procedures have been modified to promote social distancing.
- Seating inside the courtrooms and other court spaces will be marked to maintain proper social distancing.
- To promote social distancing, only two people will be permitted to use an elevator at the same time, and the elevators will be marked accordingly.
- Signage will be posted in the Federal Buildings as a reminder of the face covering and social distancing requirements.
- The face covering and social distancing requirements have been included in an Order of the Court. The United States Marshals Service, the Federal Protective Service, and Court Security Officers are authorized to enforce the Court's Order.
- Hand sanitizers will be available for your use at multiple locations in the Federal Buildings.
- Areas where prospective jurors have access will be cleaned daily.

As you know, we need a full complement of prospective jurors from which to select a representative sample for jury service. That said, it is not our desire to place any juror in jeopardy, as your health and well-being remain of paramount importance to the Court. Therefore, jurors are asked to self-monitor for symptoms or circumstances associated with COVID-19. In that regard, we ask that you take your own temperature and advise us in advance if you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, severe cough, or shortness of breath. We also ask that you determine if you fall into any of the following categories:

- Persons who have been diagnosed with or have had known contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Persons who are actively caring for someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
- Persons who have been advised to self-quarantine by any doctor, hospital, or health agency, and who will be in that status on the date on which you are summoned for jury duty.
- Persons who reside with, or have had close contact with, someone who has been advised to self-quarantine by any doctor, hospital, or health agency.

If any of the above circumstances apply to you, please advise the Jury Clerk immediately by contacting the Clerk's Office on St. Croix at (340) 718-1130 or federaljuryservice-stx@vid.uscourts.gov, or on St. Thomas at (340) 774-0640 or federaljuryservice-stt@vid.uscourts.gov. Please also contact the Jury Clerk with any other COVID-related concerns that you might have regarding your jury service. We ask that you include the participant number that appears on your jury summons on all communications with the Clerk's Office.

The Court greatly appreciates the time and attention that you will devote to the jury selection process. At the same time, we recognize that no one should be placed in a position of undue risk. Accordingly, the Court will continue to monitor closely CDC and VIDOH reports, guidelines and recommendations as well as the Government of the Virgin Islands' recovery response to COVID-19, and we will exercise our best efforts to take the necessary precautions to help promote your health and safety. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Wilma A. Lewis
Chief Judge

cc: Glenda L. Lake, Esq.
Clerk of Court