

Grand Jury Service FAQs

What is a grand jury?

A federal grand jury is composed of 23 jurors who come together to hear testimony or to be presented other evidence for the purpose of determining whether an individual or organization should be indicted or formally charged with a crime. A federal grand jury does not actually determine guilt or innocence. The grand jury only determines whether there is sufficient evidence to reasonably believe that a person or organization should be or should not be charged with a crime. If the grand jury does return an indictment, the individual or business may then be brought to trial before a petit or trial jury for determination of guilt or innocence.

The grand jury serves as an important safeguard for citizens. The grand jury system requires that the government make a reasonable showing of a crime to a body of average citizens before the government can bring felony charges against an individual or organization.

Where are Grand Jury Sessions held?

Grand Jury sessions are held in Asheville for the Asheville Division and Grand Jury sessions are held in Charlotte for the Charlotte and Statesville Divisions.

How long must I serve?

Service on a grand jury in the Western District of North Carolina is typically 12 months. On occasion, a grand jury may be extended to the maximum service time of 18 months.

How often will I serve?

Our grand juries typically meet 1-3 days each month.

How will I be notified regarding monthly service during my term?

Monthly reminders are mailed approximately one week prior to each scheduled meeting. If a meeting is to be cancelled, you will receive a notice as well.

What if I need to miss or be excused from a grand jury meeting?

You will contact your foreperson to decide for short-term excuses. Long-term excuses (for more than three months) will need to be approved by a judge. In the case of a long-term excuse request, you will submit a letter of explanation to the jury administrator. The jury administrator will then consult with one of the judges and then advise you regarding the outcome of your request.

Is there a dress code?

While no formal dress code exists, jurors are requested to dress in a manner respectful to the Court. You will have to pass through a metal detector each time you enter the courthouse, therefore you may not want to wear steel toe shoes and leave excess metal and jewelry at home to speed your entry.

Can I bring my cellular telephone or computer?

If you wish to be allowed to bring your personal cell phone or laptop into the Courthouse, you must present your summons and ID upon your arrival. If not, you will not be allowed to bring any electronics into the building.

Can I request a permanent excuse?

If you are seeking a permanent excuse, mail the questionnaire back with a note of explanation and/or a supporting documentation such as doctor's note, certificate of prior jury service or proof of a new address. Requests for excuse must be made in writing at least two weeks prior to your first date of service.

What about severe/inclement weather situations?

This instruction is for grand jurors ONLY.

The jury administrator and the judges routinely track anticipated weather situations. We normally try to notify everyone by phone the day before any anticipated problems; however, sometimes the unexpected does happen overnight or we are unable to make an informed decision the day before a possible weather situation. In this event, you will call 704-350-7415 for updated instructions.

How do I tell my employer that I have been selected for grand jury service?

A standard form letter for employers will be provided to you upon your selection as a grand juror.

What about my job?

Your employment is protected pursuant to 28 U.S. Code Section 1875 which reads in part: "No employer shall discharge, threaten to discharge, intimidate, or coerce any permanent employee by reason of such employee's jury service, or the attendance or scheduled attendance in connection with such service, in any court of the United States..." Any employer who violates the provisions of this section:

1. Shall be liable for damages for any loss of wages or other benefits suffered by an employee by reason of such violation;
2. May be enjoined from further violation of this section and ordered to provide other appropriate relief, including but not limited to the reinstatement of any employee discharged by reason of his/her jury service; and
3. Shall be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000.00 for each violation as to each employee.

Any juror, grand juror, or potential juror who experiences such behavior should patiently listen to the employer and then contact the jury clerk or other court officer immediately.