

## **Jurors Key to Fair, Functioning Justice System**

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*By: Judge Matthew C. Christian, District Court Judge in Fairbanks.*

On behalf of the Alaska Court System and the judges of the District and Superior Court, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to those who honored their civic duty and appeared for jury service.

The right to trial by jury, whether in a civil or criminal matter, is a fundamental right. This right separates the U.S. from many places in the world. It is a right that many have bled, fought and died to protect. The right to jury trial is so critical that it is embedded in our national and state Constitutions. We are fortunate that our community members recognize the critical nature of jury service and fulfill their civic duty.

In fiscal year 2014, 5,403 jurors appeared for service throughout the Fourth Judicial District, which stretches from Bethel and western Alaska to the Canadian border. Ultimately, 820 jurors were selected to serve for trial juries throughout the district. As a system reliant upon citizens to make important decisions, we appreciate the time and attention each and every juror paid to the case before him or her.

From a judicial perspective, the care our community members take to serve and conscientiously consider matters never ceases to amaze. In a recent trial, a juror appeared for the jury selection process on a day when the temperature was approaching forty below. She was disabled from recent surgery and her husband at home needed critical care.

Her 17-year-old grandson stayed home from school to care for his grandfather to enable her to honor her civic duty. I thanked her before the remainder of the jurors and expressed what it meant to us as a system that someone in her situation would find a way to honor her duty. When she was excused from service, a few jurors began to clap for her. Two jurors jumped to their feet and held the doors for her as she left the courtroom.

I spoke to her to obtain permission to reference the situation in this piece. She expressed how moved she was by the acts of her fellow jurors, and what a tremendous honor it was to take part in the process. She also expressed a

sincere desire to serve as a juror at a future date. Likewise, Magistrate Judge Bruce Ward conducted a jury trial in Emmonak. Many potential jurors came to Emmonak from surrounding villages. Various community members volunteered, and did in fact house those jurors that traveled to Emmonak but lacked lodging. We are inspired by the acts of our communities.

When you receive a jury duty summons in the mail, know that your participation is valued and critical to a fair and functioning justice system. All parties appearing in court deserve a fair trial. Without you, our system of having matters determined by citizens could not exist. We are honored by your participation.