

## **GRAND JUROR SUMMONS – COMING SOON TO YOUR MAILBOX!**

Have you ever wondered what a grand jury is and what goes on in their meetings? Due to recent legislative changes regarding how a grand jury is selected, you may soon get the opportunity to see for yourself!

**What is a grand jury and what do they do?** A grand jury is a cross section of 12 members from the community that “*inquire into all offenses that could result in criminal charges being filed.*” They generally meet several times a year and hear potential criminal cases presented by an attorney representing the State (usually the District Attorney). Once the case has been presented, the grand jury will take a vote on whether to file formal charges or not. If the majority is in favor, a bill of indictment will be returned by the grand jury which initiates the felony criminal case. The proceedings of the grand jury are kept secret. No one is allowed into the grand jury room unless they are members of the grand jury, testifying witnesses, the bailiff, the attorney representing the state, an interpreter or the stenographer.

**What has changed?** In the past grand jurors were selected through a grand jury commission. The commissioners would meet and make a list of between 15 and 40 persons to be summoned as grand jurors. The commissioners would place their list in an envelope, seal it and deliver it to the district judge in open court. The judge would then deliver the sealed envelope to the District Clerk for safekeeping until the judge notified the District Clerk to impanel the grand jury. When notified, the Clerk would then open the sealed envelope, prepare the grand juror summons and deliver them to the Sheriff for mailing to the potential grand jurors.

During this last legislative session in Austin, Article 19.01 of the Code of Criminal Procedure was amended ending the practice of selecting grand jurors through the grand jury commission as described above. The new law that went into effect on September 1, 2015, states that:

“The District Judge **shall** direct that 20 to 125 prospective grand jurors be selected and summoned, with return on summons, in the same manner as for the selection and summons of panels for the trial of civil cases in the district courts. The judge shall try the qualifications for and excuses from service as a grand juror and impanel the completed grand jury as provided by this chapter.”

**What does this mean to me?** What this means for all of us is that the grand jury summons will now be issued in the same manner in which our regular (petit) juries are summoned. There will be no more grand jury commissioners to supply the names of potential grand jurors. The District Clerk’s office will use the computer generated jury wheel to randomly select and send out the 125 jury summons for grand jury. If you are a registered voter or have a Texas Driver’s License or ID card, you could be summoned for grand jury service. As with the petit jury summons, there are qualifications and exemptions which are listed on your grand jury summons.

If you receive one of our grand jury summons, we hope to see you. Come be a part of the judicial system in action!

Best regards,

Lisa Pitre  
Sabine County District Clerk