



BAY AREA LEGAL AID

October 1, 2020

Andrew Taylor
Superior Court of California, County of Alameda
1225 Fallon Street, Room 209
Oakland, CA 94612

To Whom It May Concern:

I write on behalf of Bay Area Legal Aid to urge the Court to reconsider its decision to institute county-wide jury pools for misdemeanor trials.

Bay Area Legal Aid provides free civil legal services to low-income residents of Alameda County, many of whom are disabled. Traveling across-county to serve on a jury would be a tremendous hardship for our clients. Alameda County is large, and transportation across it is difficult for our clients. Many of our clients do not own cars and/or are not licensed to drive, and so could only get to court on the other side of the county using the slow and expensive public transportation system. It takes about an hour and costs about \$5.00 to traverse from Oakland to the Fremont Hall of Justice on public transportation. COVID-19 has aggravated the transportation problem, because the virus has made public transportation a health risk for riders, and has caused service reductions in Alameda County's public transportation systems. Travel difficulties would be further compounded for our disabled clients, who due to their disabilities would risk and struggle even more to cover the distance.

These hardships would create multiple adverse consequences. Most immediately, our clients' participation on juries would decrease because they would simply be less able to report. And, clients who cannot report to jury duty will be subject to penalties for failing to report.

Further, reducing our clients' ability to participate in the judicial system as jurors would further alienate low-income communities from the criminal justice system. That outcome would be counter to Alameda County's goal of mending relationships between law enforcement actors and low-income communities, and would weaken the Alameda County Courts as a civic institution. Our clients' decreased participation on juries would also deny many misdemeanor criminal defendants juries reflective of their communities, and would have a disparate impact on low-income communities of color. It is particularly important to maintain a local jury reporting system in Oakland, where so many of our clients live.

For these reasons, we sincerely hope you will reconsider your plan to eliminate local jury panels and to institute county-wide jury pools for misdemeanor trials.

Sincerely,

Catherine Kimel
Staff Attorney