



Office of Ellis County Judge Todd Little
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“Judge Little & Courts Hold First Jury Selection in 15 Months”

Ellis County, TX – On May 20th, 2021, the 40th District Court of Texas held its first jury trial in 15 months. In the midst of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) & the Texas Supreme Court suspended jury trials and postponed most cases to prevent further virus outbreaks. As the State of Texas opens back up, Ellis County’s district courts are implementing measures to honor the fundamental right to trial by jury.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, trial courts across Texas initially attempted to convene juries virtually. The process proved unfeasible due to logistical and technological constraints, ultimately leading to the OCA & the Texas Supreme Court suspending jury trials. After a year of backlogged cases, however, the emergency suspension was allowed to expire. Ellis County’s district courts promptly initiated a new jury-selection process that incorporated a simple COVID-19 screening questionnaire.

In the questionnaire, prospective jurors were given the option to opt out of jury duty if they had recently experienced symptoms of COVID-19. However, prospective jurors were not permitted to opt out of jury duty simply due to discomfort over in-person trials. As of May 18th, face masks are no longer required in any Texas government facility, including courts. In Ellis County’s district courts, transparent face shields are still available to jurors who desire them.

Because jury trials were suspended by the state government during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than a year’s worth of civil and criminal cases were postponed for the 40th District Court as well as other district & county courts – including the cases of several Ellis County Jail inmates awaiting trial for over a year. Now, these cases will finally be heard. “We are certainly glad things are returning to normal,” said Judge Bob Carroll of the 40th District Court, “but more than that, we recognize the vital importance of trial by jury in the American judicial system – a bedrock Constitutional principle.”

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