

- SUBJECT:** Increase in maximum fine for failure to report for jury duty
- COMMITTEE:** Criminal Jurisprudence — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Place, Talton, Farrar, Greenberg, Nixon, Pickett, Pitts, Solis
0 nays
1 absent — Hudson
- WITNESSES:** For — Bonnie Sudderth, Fort Worth Municipal Court, State Bar of Texas and Texas Municipal Courts Association
Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** The Code of Criminal Procedures caps at \$20 the fine for failure to respond to a summons to jury duty in a municipal or justice of the peace court.
HB 1204 would increase the fine from \$20 to a maximum of \$100 to a person who fails to show up to jury duty in certain courts. HB 1204 would take effect on September 1, 1995.
- SUPPORTERS SAY:** The \$20 cap on fines for those who ignore the law by not showing up for jury duty when summoned was set decades ago and is woefully inadequate for today's conditions. Many people prefer to pay the fine rather than show up for jury duty. This works a hardship on the courts and on the responsible people who do appear when summoned.
The current fine is not large enough to deter most individuals, who may prefer paying a \$20 fine to showing up for jury duty for municipal or justice court. If the cap is raised to \$100, prospective jurors may think twice about failing to respond to a jury summons.
Current law provides numerous exceptions for hardship cases, such as exempting from jury duty persons age 65 and over, high school and college students, those who serve as a primary caretaker of an invalid person, those on religious holiday or with religious objections to jury duty, the illiterate, etc. A higher fine would not cause any difficulties for persons who have legitimate exemptions, but would target those who have been purposely disregarding the law.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Increasing the maximum fine for failing to respond to a jury summons could create a hardship for poor people unable to pay a \$100 fine. Most people want to exercise their civic duty and serve on jury duty. They should not be so severely penalized for an oversight or a lapse in memory.