



# Marilyn Burgess

HARRIS COUNTY DISTRICT CLERK

201 Caroline | P.O. Box 4651 | Houston, Texas 77210-4651 | 832-927-5800 |

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **District Clerk Marilyn Burgess receives prestigious national award for improving jury service in Harris County**

**The National Center for State Courts has distinguished District Clerk Burgess for implementing an electronic summoning system and for providing free parking and coffee to jurors**

**This week, the Harris County Commissioners Court also recognized District Clerk Burgess with a Resolution for winning the award**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL:**

**Thursday, December 2, 2021**

**at 2:00 PM**

**Contact: Alvaro 'Al' Ortiz – Public Information Officer**

**Phone: 832-927-5764/63 (Office) / 832-367-4823 (Cell)**

**Email 1: [alvaro.ortiz@hcdistrictclerk.com](mailto:alvaro.ortiz@hcdistrictclerk.com)**

**Email 2: [media@hcdistrictclerk.com](mailto:media@hcdistrictclerk.com)**

Houston (TX) December 2, 2021 – Today, Harris County District Clerk Marilyn Burgess received the prestigious G. Thomas Munsterman Award for Jury Innovation in a ceremony held at the renovated Jury Assembly Building, in downtown Houston. The award is bestowed by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), which has distinguished District Clerk Burgess for successfully implementing e-Juror, an electronic summoning system, as well as for providing free parking and coffee to Harris County jurors, and launching an outreach campaign to promote participation in jury service. The NCSC also valued District Clerk Burgess' advocacy for a juror pay increase to improve appearance rates and increase diversity in Harris County juries.

The NCSC highlighted that District Clerk Burgess is making jury service more convenient for residents in the most populated county in Texas. With e-Juror, prospective jurors are instructed to pre-register online or call our jury staff to pre-register over the phone. They are also given the opportunity to claim a qualifying exemption or disqualification online.

Through this system, the District Clerk's Office (DCO) captures the jurors' email and cell phone number and uses the email to send an assigned date to appear. If that date does not work for the prospective juror, they are given the opportunity to reschedule immediately and get a second date.

A week prior to their service date, prospective jurors receive an email reminder about their jury duty. The day prior to their service, they receive a second reminder email and a text message. One of the biggest advantages of the e-Juror system is the ability to project how many summoned jurors will actually appear on their day of service. The implementation of the first phase of this system has already proven to be very effective. From May through October of 2021, 93 percent of those who pre-registered through e-Juror and were assigned a date to appear did show up.

Additionally, in situations where cases settle or are delayed, e-Juror provides the ability to reschedule or cancel jurors if the system indicates more than needed will appear for service on a given day.



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The NCSC also recognized District Clerk Burgess for securing funding in June from the Harris County Commissioners Court to provide free parking, coffee and meal vouchers for jurors, as well as for her efforts to promote jury participation through the “Stand for Justice” awareness campaign that the DCO launched in February.

Earlier this year, District Clerk Burgess proposed a juror pay increase to Commissioners Court from the current \$6 for the first day and \$40 for subsequent days to \$50 for the first day and \$80 for subsequent days. The Court tabled this pay increase until Harris County fully overcomes the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, District Clerk Burgess will ask the Court to reconsider her proposal.

“The innovations that Ms. Burgess has championed in Harris County demonstrate concrete steps that courts can take to eliminate barriers to jury service. Her use of technology makes jury service more convenient for citizens and the amenities her office provides shows respect for the wellbeing of jurors,” said Mary C. McQueen, President of the National Center for State Courts. “Ms. Burgess’ tireless advocacy for increased juror compensation recognizes the economic challenges that prevent some citizens from participating in the American justice system,” added Ms. McQueen.

Paula Hannaford, director of the NCSC’s Center for Jury Studies, also praised District Clerk Burgess’ innovative accomplishments. “Ms. Burgess has made a significant impact with jury utilization in Harris County. She has found a way to make the process more convenient and efficient” said Hannaford.

“I am deeply honored to receive the G. Thomas Munsterman Award. Since I ran for office, one of my priorities has been to modernize the District Clerk’s Office. The good results e-Juror is bringing in terms of jury participation are encouraging, and the amenities we have gotten for our jurors are one more step towards making this crucial civic duty more pleasant for Harris County residents,” said District Clerk Burgess. “All these gains are the result of exemplary dedication by the DCO’s staff, specifically our Jury, IT and Communications Teams. I am proud to lead this organization,” she added.

This Tuesday, November 30, the Harris County Commissioners Court also recognized District Clerk Burgess and presented her with a Resolution for winning the Munsterman Award.

The award is named for G. Thomas Munsterman, founder and former director of NCSC’s Center for Jury Studies and an internationally renowned innovator in jury systems and research.

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### About the Harris County District Clerk’s Office

The Harris County District Clerk’s Office (DCO) supports over 90 courts and is registrar, recorder, and custodian of all court pleadings, instruments, and papers for legal proceedings in the District Courts and the County Criminal Courts at Law. The DCO is also responsible for summoning Harris County residents for jury service. Other duties include providing authorities with court orders, securing trial evidence, and maintaining the court registry, as well as assessing and collecting court costs, fines, and fees, and processing passport applications.