

## **June 19 public forum to focus on jury service in Bolivar County**

June 13, 2014

A public forum on jury service is scheduled for 6 p.m. June 19 at the Bolivar County Courthouse in Cleveland. The public is invited.

The Bolivar County Circuit Court Task Force is gathering information that may help officials to understand citizens' reluctance to serve on juries, to find ways to increase citizens' response to jury summonses, and to improve the jury experience for all who do their civic duty.

The Task Force will hear public comments regarding Circuit Court jury service. Citizens who have served on jury duty or been summoned for jury service in the past are welcome to share their experiences and ideas. Local officials also are invited to speak.

Persons who wish to speak at the forum are asked to limit their comments to no more than two minutes, so that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

Arthur Calderon, a staff attorney for the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court District, will serve as moderator.

Anyone who wishes to submit written comments may send them to Circuit Clerk Marilyn L. Kelly, P.O. Box 670, Cleveland, MS 38732.

The public forum also is intended to be a first step in a continuing program to educate citizens about their judicial system. Circuit Judge Albert B. Smith III will talk about the importance of jury service and the invaluable role of citizens in the fair and efficient functioning of the judicial system.

Any class, civic, business, church or other group who would like to tour the court or invite Judge Smith to speak at some future date should contact Court Administrator Rebecca Dean at 662-843-3346.

Responses to jury summonses have declined in recent years in the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit District. Recently, the Task Force met to discuss the latest occurrence of insufficient jurors in a capital murder trial. Thirty days before the court term began, 250 juror summonses were mailed to registered voters randomly selected from the voter rolls. On the day of trial 52 people, or 21 percent, failed to appear. The Postal Service returned 65 summonses, or 26 percent, as undeliverable. A total of 60 prospective jurors, or 24 percent, appeared in court. Others had been excused in advance for statutorily allowed reasons. After all prospective jurors had been questioned and numerous people were dismissed for cause, only nine remained. A criminal jury trial requires 12 people, and two alternates are needed. The court was forced to declare a mistrial and reschedule the case.

For more information, contact Circuit Clerk Marilyn L. Kelly at 662-843-2061.

**Bolivar County Circuit Court Task Force**

Senior Circuit Judge Albert B. Smith III

Circuit Clerk Marilyn L. Kelly

Sheriff Kelvin Williams III

####