

Your Seat Matters: A Personal Plea to Show Up for Jury Duty

By Attorney Brenda Stallings

I've practiced law for nearly three decades. I've stood beside hundreds of clients, advocated in multiple courtrooms, and mentored new attorneys to lead with zeal and passion. But nothing fully prepared me for the moment I became a plaintiff, a Black woman fighting for her career, her livelihood, and her name in a federal racial discrimination case against the Arkansas Public Defender's Commission.

Not once, but twice, I found myself sitting in a federal courtroom, not as counsel, but as the one seeking justice. I had to place my trust in a jury of "my peers," knowing full well that the idea of "peers" can look very different in practice.

In the first trial, one juror simply didn't return after Trump's 34-count felony conviction was announced. In the second trial, several jurors had adopted children, which offered another layer to their perspective. In both trials, the jurors were pulled from across the State of Arkansas, not just Pulaski or Perry County. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences added complexity to the deliberation process.

Every single day I sat in that federal courtroom hoping and praying that those jurors could truly see me, hear me, and understand what I was up against. That they could move beyond any unconscious bias and genuinely listen.

And to their credit, they did. They listened. They sifted through the lies, saw the truth, and ruled in my favor.

But here's what matters most: None of that would have happened if they hadn't shown up.

Now I ask you: How important is it to have a jury that reflects your community, your values, your lived experience?

Let me tell you: It matters deeply.

There's a persistent misconception in our community, that jury duty is just a nuisance. That it's something to avoid. Something that interrupts your schedule, your business, your life.

But I want you to know this: Your voice in that jury box could be the deciding voice. Your presence could bring context. Your perspective could bring clarity. Your experience could bring justice.

When we don't show up, we surrender that power. We leave verdicts to people who may not know our stories or worse, who may not care to.

This is my personal plea: Show up.

When you're called for jury duty, take your seat.

Take it for the people who are praying for someone like you to be in that room.

Take it because your presence might be the only difference between injustice and justice.

Your seat matters.

Please serve.

"Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on." — Justice Thurgood Marshall

This piece is part of an ongoing series on legal empowerment, equity, and justice in our communities.