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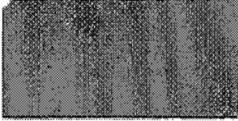
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November 20, 2005

MY VIEW: THEODORE R. BOEHM

Teamwork leads to jury pool improvement

More than 2,000 jury trials are held in Indiana every year, which means tens of thousands of Hoosiers will be called for service as potential jurors.

The jury system has evolved over the centuries. At one time only landowners could serve and members of minority groups and women were excluded. Today, with few exceptions, anyone older than 18 can – and should – be part of the jury pool. Although some unfortunately seek to avoid jury service, the vast majority of those who do serve report that they very much benefited from the experience. Of course, the justice system benefits also, and justice and the general public are best served, if every eligible citizen is included in the pool.

In 2006, Indiana courts will have the most comprehensive, accurate list of potential jurors ever compiled. In the past those called for jury duty have been drawn from voter registration and other lists that are both under-populated (because many people do not register to vote) and overpopulated (because the lists included many who had died or moved).

The Indiana Supreme Court's Jury Pool Project has now made a new jury pool list available to every county in the state. By combining the two most complete and current lists (the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and Department of Revenue) we were able to create a list that includes anyone who pays taxes, drives or has a state ID card. Because revenue records are updated annually, and the lists is checked through the U.S. Postal Service validation process, the names and addresses are as accurate and current as possible. The U.S. Census reports there are 4,506,089 Hoosiers older than 18, and the new jury master list has 4,503,032 non-duplicated names. This compares to the old lists that included only 60 percent to 80 percent of the eligible residents in most counties. The result is not only a much more complete list, it also means significant cost savings in avoiding mailings to people who are no longer living at that address.

This achievement was made possible through cooperation across the branches of government. The Department of Revenue, BMV, Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, Purdue University and local jury administrators from Allen, Henry, Hamilton, Hunting, Lake, Lawrence, and Marion countie all contributed significantly to the project.

Modern technology was necessary to create this vastly improved list of potential jurors. But more important, we had the participation of several state and county agencies who lent their skill and energy to make this possible. Every arm of government ultimately works for the citizens, and Hoosiers should take pride in the cooperative spirit that produced this project, which serves them, and justice, very well.

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