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Unique Pilot Program Shows Success in Expanding Racial and Economic Diversity in San Francisco Jury Pools



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[The Financial Justice Project](#) released a [new report](#) on the findings of the first six months of the Be The Jury Pilot Program. The [Be The Jury Pilot Program](#) tests whether providing \$100 per day as compensation to jurors with lower incomes helps foster juries that are made up of a balanced cross section of San Francisco residents.

The preliminary findings show that the pilot program helps level the playing field, making it possible for San Franciscans with lower incomes to participate in their community's constitutional right to a jury by their peers. These results were [featured](#) in an *San Francisco Chronicle* article by Justin Phillips.

[Read Report Here](#)

Preliminary Findings

After six months of the pilot program, we are excited to share preliminary data and impacts from the program in this report:



The vast majority of Be The Jury participants could not have served without the \$100 per day stipend.

81% of participants said that this program made it possible for them to serve as a juror.



Program participants reflect the racial demographics of the broader San Francisco population.

63% of participants self-identified as people of color.



Feedback from program participants has been overwhelmingly positive. People report having learned about the importance of jury service and encourage the continuation of the program to support other jurors.

95% of participants completed a voluntary survey.



Program participants have low incomes. Program participants have a household income of just under \$40,000, on average. As a point of comparison, the area median income in San Francisco for a single household is \$97,000.

\$40,000 average household income of participants.

Jury duty is perhaps the most meaningful opportunity for true civic engagement that our system provides. However, due to financial constraints, many prospective jurors, often those from the neighborhoods most impacted by the criminal legal system, are deprived of this opportunity for engagement due to economic hardship. In San Francisco, a survey found that 35 percent of jurors report that jury service imposed a financial hardship.

The [Be The Jury Pilot Program](#) compensates jurors with low-to-moderate incomes with \$100 per day for jury service in criminal trials. Jurors are eligible if their household income is less than 80% of the Area Median Income (\$74,600 for a single person; \$106,550 for a household of four) and if they meet one of the following criteria: (1) their employer does not compensate for jury service; (2) their employer does not compensate for the estimated duration of jury service; (3) they are self-employed; or (4) they are unemployed. This program was authorized by California [Assembly Bill 1452](#).

Kiswendsida Kola is a San Francisco resident who participated in the program. “Be the Jury “showed me the city cares about its residents and its justice system,” Kola told the San Francisco Chronicle. **“As a juror, it allowed me to focus on the case. I didn’t have to think about my basic needs like being able to buy a meal while serving as a juror.”**

“In our country’s history, laws barred certain communities from serving on juries. Be The Jury is groundbreaking because even when those discriminatory laws changed, low-income jurors—many being Black, Asian, Latino—struggled to be able to serve because they couldn’t give up their wages,” **said San**

Francisco Mayor London Breed. “Be The Jury is the kind of smart, innovative change that will create a more equitable and fair criminal justice system.”

We hope that Be The Jury advances our collective thinking on juror compensation. Providing fair compensation to people who otherwise cannot afford to serve on a jury due to financial hardship is an important step to create a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse justice system.

[Read Report Here](#)

Be The Jury is a collaborative effort among San Francisco’s justice partners. We are grateful to the San Francisco Superior Court, Public Defender’s Office, District Attorney’s Office, and San Francisco Bar Association.

Yours in Financial Justice,

Anne, Michelle, and Cecilia

San Francisco is the first city and county in the nation to launch a [Financial Justice Project](#) to assess and reform fees and fines that have an adverse disproportionate impact on our city’s low-income residents and communities of color.

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