



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Americans Say “No” to Possible Suspension of Civil Jury Trials During Judicial Funding Crisis

DRI Poll Shows Huge Majorities Across Various Demographics in Opposition

CHICAGO – (March 24, 2014)—They may not be certain that there even is a funding shortage for the judiciary, but Americans are quite sure that addressing it by suspending civil jury trials is unacceptable. This is one of the findings in a recent national poll by DRI –The Voice of the Defense Bar. The poll is conducted by DRI’s Center for Law and Public Policy and is the only annual, national poll dedicated exclusively to the civil justice system.

In response to another poll question, 40% thought the courts had sufficient funding to do their job adequately while an equal percentage thought the courts were short of needed funding. A surprisingly high percentage (19%) simply didn’t know. The results are puzzling because of massive media attention for months on the shortage of funding in both federal and state courts and the difficulty that shortage is causing in terms of curtailment of hours, a reduction in security at courthouses, and staff shortage due to layoffs and forced furloughs. Things have gotten so bad that courts in some areas have talked of the possibility of suspending civil jury trials.

But regardless of where the public comes down in terms of funding shortages, there is broad agreement that suspension of civil jury trials is not an acceptable solution. The poll measures opinion across fourteen different demographic categories (gender, age, income, education, etc.) and in nearly every category, opposition ranges in percentages from the mid-70’s to the low 80’s. Republicans, in general, register higher opposition to suspension than Democrats with liberal/moderate Republicans showing a whopping 89% in opposition to a suspension. Overall, 85% of all registered Republicans would oppose a suspension compared to 77% of registered Democrats and 72% of independents.

“I suppose there is good news and bad news in this,” said John R. Kouris, DRI executive director. “The bad news is that great uncertainty about the financial straits of the courts is reflected in the data. This means that the pleadings and warnings of the courts are not having much of an impact on the public, or that much of the public simply questions the validity of them. The good news is that Americans seem to have a sense of ownership of the judicial system

and just don't want their right of access to be tampered with, whatever the reason. Americans are very united on that.”

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About DRI – The Voice of the Defense Bar

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