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Opinion

Readers respond: Essentials of justice

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Letters to the editor



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In his op-ed, ([“Ensuring public safety remains an essential duty during pandemic,”](#) April 8), Kevin Barton wrote about parts of our criminal justice system being essential, with a big pat on the back to his district attorney’s office and other governmental

bodies. But in his zeal to congratulate those entities, he left out others necessary to our participatory democracy. Specifically, he fails to mention the accused, their attorneys and the jurors, all of whom are essential to our justice system.

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Imagine the trial Mr. Barton mentioned with a judge at the free-throw line and jurors spread out in a gymnasium. Such an arrangement is in support of social distancing and flattening the curve. But how is an accused person supposed to interact confidentially with their lawyer six feet away? While it's admirable to offer alternative and creative ideas for holding trials, we cannot sacrifice someone's right to a fair trial and due process.

Mr. Barton also seems to ignore a fundamental fact of our justice system: An accused person is innocent unless and until the government proves guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. All of the people sitting in jail awaiting resolution of their cases are innocent people. What happens when someone at the jail contracts COVID-19? If social distancing means closing businesses and giving "stay home, save lives" orders, how does that translate to the jail? Inmates cannot stay home. They are locked in overcrowded jails. Does protecting "fundamental rights and liberty interests," in Mr. Barton's words, include sacrificing hundreds of innocent people's health?

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Robert Crow, Portland

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