



Citizens Jury Project Report January 2010

Summary

In January of 2010, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in nine (9) courthouse locations in New York City for six to twelve hours per week.¹ The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In January, 696 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 719 questions or comments.

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to interns at each site. Inquiries about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse were the most common juror questions at six (6) CJP sites in January 2010.² At three (3) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³

New York County

60 Centre Street: During January, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 44 jurors with 46 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (18). Twelve (12) jurors asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Ten (10) questions concerned postponement or difficulty in serving. One (1) juror asked in frustration, “*Why is it so hard to find the bathroom?*”

100 Centre Street: During January, 96 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 102 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (73). Nine (9) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and nine (9) were in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. One (1) juror offered these appreciative comments: “*Everyone was very good at communicating, this courthouse has friendly officers, and the clerks are respectful.*”

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During January, 81 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 85 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (51).

Eight (8) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and eight (8) came from jurors who arrived late. Six (6) jurors shared suggestions, including:

The seat numbers in the room the jurors are called to sit and fill out questionnaires should be numbered instead of having the jurors count to the seat they are assigned to. For example, when a juror is assigned to seat 13, they have to count themselves to find it. They should be numbered instead.

It would help if they gave us coffee.

I suggest they get more seats.

The security procedures need to be quicker for the jury.

The laptops in the jury lounge need to be quicker and updated. Thank You.

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During January, 80 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 83 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (45). Twelve (12) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and seven (7) were in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. One (1) juror suggested: *“They need a better sound system, we can barely hear anything out in the hall.”*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During January, 41 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 43 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (16). Seven (7) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Five (5) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. One (1) juror suggested the installation of electric outlets; in his/her own words:

I'm sitting on the 2nd floor of 320 Jay St Brooklyn NY on my 1st day of jury duty. There are no electric outlets in this very large room. None(!). It would reduce the stress of your jurors if we could charge our phones & laptops while waiting. . . . [I]t would make a huge difference in the service.

360 Adams Street: During January, 62 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 65 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (30). Nine (9) questions came from jurors who arrived late. Eight (8) jurors asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Five (5) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During January, 104 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 106 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (49). Twenty-eight (28) questions were asked regarding postponements and difficulty in serving. Sixteen (16) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. A juror complained about another juror's cell phone use. A different juror said:

I think that jury duty is a waste of time because for most of the day we just sit here and wait. They tell us to be here by 9-9:30am but they do not start talking until 10am. It would be better if as soon as we got here they got the show on the road and started calling people.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During January, 13 jurors approached interns with 13 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (5). Four (4) questions were asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Nassau County

Mineola: During January, 169 jurors approached interns with 174 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (137). Sixteen (16) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Seven (7) questions were asked regarding postponements and difficulty in serving. There were four (4) questions about the use of computers. One (1) juror described her recent juror experience as a "complete 180" (in a positive direction) from the last time she was called to serve. She identified the video and guest speaker (Supreme Court Justice Edward W. McCarty, III) as reasons for the improvement.

Virtual Ombudservice Comment

Three (3) comments received via the virtual ombudservice were:

Just concerned that the Petit Jury orientation video (haven't seen the Grand Jury video) mentions Jesus Christ by name... not that I'm offended, but I'm not sure if that's appropriate. Especially in a place as religiously diverse as Queens in New York City.

From a grand juror:

It's not fair that they don't coordinate the schedule for grand jury. My job pays me, and it's intrusive on my schedule to be here after 5pm. I do not want to be here. It is unfair that I am here after 5pm sometimes.

The location of these courthouses were not specified. However, a grand juror at One Hogan Place had this to say, after concluding her service:

. . . I served on the grand jury that finished on New Year's Eve.
Thanks so much for all you did to make the experience a positive one.

I wrote something for my website⁴ and thought you might find it interesting. It's on the front page now. Here's the link: www.womanaroundtown.com.

Comments Regarding CJP

CJP received a number of compliments, including:

I am very glad that Judith Kaye and the people of CJP put their efforts to really hear the concerns of the jurors. I thank you and I am very appreciative. Keep up the good work.

Thank you very much for helping us. This is my first time serving jury duty.

Two (2) other jurors also praised CJP and former Chief Judge Judith Kaye for the improvements they have made to the jury service process. One of them referred specifically to improvements that she has seen, such as the shortening of the process to just two days.

¹ While booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week, there are exceptions. In the Bronx, jurors are called twice each week, and so the booth there is operated two days per week. In Brooklyn, interns arrive after the court's orientation (as requested by court personnel). Interns work until lunch time, when most or all jurors leave the courthouse. Lunchtime varies, but often begins before 1 p.m. Additionally, interns occasionally report that jurors have been discharged early, meaning, of course, that there is no one left to approach them. CJP began operating in Minneola this month.

² Examples of questions about location include: "Where can I get lunch/coffee/a newspaper?"; "Where are the restrooms/water fountains/elevators?"; and "Where is the subway/post office?"

³ Generally, such questions include "Can I leave? Is there a sign-out sheet?"; "When is lunch?"; "Can I use my cell phone/smoke/eat here?"; "How long does jury service last?"; and "Will I get something proving I served?"

⁴ Excerpts from the juror's piece follow:

[Serving Time on the Grand Jury](http://www.womanaroundtown.com/tag/100-centre-street/) (on the site Women Around Town)

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Wednesday, January 6th, 2010

Despite watching endless episodes of *Law & Order*, many people don't understand the workings of the grand jury. One friend, a lawyer, asked me what judge we were before. There is no judge in grand jury proceedings. Were we going to convict anyone, another person asked. Grand juries don't convict, they hand down an indictment, deciding whether there is enough evidence to formally charge a person with a crime or other offense.

The month seemed to fly by (just kidding). But it didn't turn out to be a difficult chore. In fact, I had fun. I enjoyed the other people on the grand jury and at the conclusion of our service, exchanged e-mail addresses with a few. Going through this experience together created a bond. I was impressed with how serious we all took our duties. And I developed a true admiration for those who work in the court system. It's clear an effort is being made so that jury duty is less onerous. Everyone we encountered from the police officers manning the security checkpoint in the lobby to the custodians who cleaned our room daily, were courteous and accommodating.