



## **Citizens Jury Project Report December 2009**

### **Summary**

In December of 2009, 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.<sup>1</sup> The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In December, 283 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 306 questions or comments. Many locations did not call jurors during the second half of the month, accounting for the relatively small number of 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 eight (8) CJP sites in December 2009.<sup>2</sup> At one (1) site, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.<sup>3</sup>

### **New York County**

**60 Centre Street:** During December, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 10 jurors with 10 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (8).

**100 Centre Street:** During December, 17 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 18 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (10). Two (2) late jurors approached interns.

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** During December, 22 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 24 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (13). Four (4) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Three (3) questions were unrelated to jury service.

**111 Centre Street, 11<sup>th</sup> floor:** During December, 26 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 28 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). There were five (5) complaints, all made on the same morning, concerning water not coming out of the restroom faucets. [Clerk advised; maintenance contacted.]

### **Kings County**

**320 Jay Street:** During December, 25 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 26 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (11). Seven (7) questions were about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Three (3) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving.

**360 Adams Street:** During December, 26 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 26 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (7). Five (5) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Five (5) late jurors approached interns. There were three (3) questions regarding computer usage. One juror suggested, *“There should be a screen where the names of called jurors appear.”*

### **Bronx County**

**215 East 161st Street:** During December, 89 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 91 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (57). Nineteen (19) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Ten (10) questions were asked regarding postponements and difficulty in serving.

### **Queens County**

**Kew Gardens:** During December, 35 jurors approached interns with 38 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (25). Four (4) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One juror suggested, *“Clarify the devices that a juror can bring into the room (for example, in Kew they say no cell phones but allow laptops).”*

### **Nassau County**

**Mineola:** During December, 37 jurors approached interns with 38 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (18). Thirteen (13) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One juror complained, *“Are you kidding with this cardio-vascular movie? It’s blasting! It’s so loud!”*

## Virtual Ombudservice Comment

One (1) comment received via the virtual ombudservice was:

I have a big problem with the swearing-in process. I served today, and learned that currently the phrase "so help me God" is included. This means that in order to serve as a juror, you must invoke and acknowledge [a] deity. For atheists or people with other belief systems, it means they must perjure themselves or else be disenfranchised.

The Bill of Rights is supposed to protect against establishment of religion, but sadly, it is completely ignored in this case. I love my country and the constitution, and it's sad to see it shredded like this.

The location of the courthouse was not specified.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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?"

<sup>3</sup> 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?"