



Citizens Jury Project Report February 2009

Summary

In February 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 and Westchester 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 February, 385 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 403 questions or comments.

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to CJP at each site. It also includes three general recommendations.

Inquiries about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse were the most common juror questions at four (4) CJP sites in February of 2009.² At four (4) sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. At the remaining location, an equal number of questions concerning location and procedure were received. Because these questions do not vary greatly from location to location, or from month to month, CJP will not set out examples by courthouse in this report.³

General Recommendations:

1. Handling of Summonses - Alternatives should be found to having jurors pass the completed summons to the end of the aisle where they sit, to be collected by court personnel. Over the months, a number of jurors have raised objections, due to the concern that this practice could result in identity theft. At locations where there is no good alternative to having jurors pass down the summonses, CJP suggests that jurors be told to pass the summonses one aisle at a time, and only when a court representative is already waiting at the end of that aisle. A senior clerk mentioned this practice to us, and finds it very effective in protecting juror privacy.
2. During *voir dire*, all judges should clearly and repeatedly state that any juror who does not want others to hear personal information is allowed and encouraged to approach the bench.
3. Update the Juror Video - A juror told an intern that "*I believe it is time to update the video that is shown to jurors. As compelling as it is, it can relate to even more people if it shows people of*

the current decade. As a suggestion, perhaps Meredith Viera can narrate this time.” OCA has told CJP that a new video is being created.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During February, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 10 jurors with 11 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (5). Three (3) questions were in regard to qualifications to serve.

100 Centre Street: During February, 41 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 45 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (22). Eleven (11) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were three (3) juror suggestions, including that, *“Workers shouldn't be so negative when they talk about jury duty. They should state that it is a privilege.”* One juror suggested that there should be a garbage can in the back of the lunch room, and another by the exit in the ladies room. There were also three (3) appreciative comments: One juror said, *“The clerks in 1517 were fantastic! Please give them raises. The judge (Judge Bartley) was polite and thanked us.”* Another juror commented, *“It is a wonderful privilege and I wish I could do it more often!”*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During February, 12 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 13 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (6). Four (4) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. One (1) juror suggested that, *“[There should be] discount parking for jurors.”*

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During February, 28 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 30 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (11). There were five (5) questions regarding qualifications to serve. One (1) juror made the appreciative comment that, *“... the restrooms are very tidy.”*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During February, 80 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 83 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (42). Fourteen (14) questions came from jurors who arrived late.⁴ Ten (10) questions involved the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. One juror commented that he was pleased with his experience so far.

360 Adams Street: During February, 55 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 57 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (16). Thirteen (13) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were seven (7) computer questions,⁵ and seven (7) late jurors. One (1) juror complained that her work email was blocked by the court's internet connection.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During February, 101 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 105 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (38). Twenty-seven (27) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Thirteen (13) late jurors approached interns.⁶ There were nine (9) complaints, including several concerning the length of the security lines. One juror complained that, “*Vending machines should be healthier. What if you have health issues?*” There were also six (6) questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One of the jurors who complained about the lines also gave the appreciative comment that, “*Security is great.*”

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During February, 33 jurors approached interns with 38 questions. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (23). Four (4) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were two (2) juror suggestions: One juror suggested that a microwave be provided, saying it's more convenient to bring his food from home, and that it is more nutritious and less costly. An intern spoke with court personnel, and was told that it would be too hazardous to have a microwave. Another juror said that there should be, “*professional jurors to teach the new jurors what to do. It [would] also create jobs.*” One juror offered these appreciative comments: “*They [the Court Officers and Clerks] are lovely and very polite.*”, and “*The computers aid with the boredom; I am glad they have computers here.*”

Westchester

111 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd: During February, 15 jurors approached interns with 15 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (3), and questions in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (3). One juror made the following appreciative comment: “*Great facility!*” Another juror appreciated the books and magazines in the lounge; she said that she was running late, and didn't have time to bring something to keep her occupied.

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.

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 All of the late jurors asked essentially the same questions: "Where do I go?" and/or "What do I do?" Rather than including this data in other categories (location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities, and concerns about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do), CJP maintains a separate category for late jurors; that is to say, these questions from late jurors are in addition to the questions recorded in the other categories. The purpose of having this separate category is to be open to the possibility that there *may* be court-related matters contributing to jurors arriving late, for instance, not enough security personnel available at peak times. However, in the past, when jurors have given a reason for arriving late, they have indicated that they, themselves, are responsible. Furthermore, in 2008, CJP coordinated with court personnel to examine security lines in Brooklyn over a two-week period, at different times during the day. The security lines were found to be functioning efficiently.

⁵ "Computer questions" include: "Can I use the computer?"; "How do I log on?"; and, "Is there a time limit?"

⁶ In regard to late jurors, please see endnote number 4, above.