



Citizens Jury Project Report January 2009

Summary

In January 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 January, 356 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 378 questions or comments. The low number of jurors approaching is most directly related to both juror and intern availability.²

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

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 January of 2009.³ At one (1) site, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. 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.⁴

General Recommendation: A juror serving at 100 Centre Street made the following suggestion to an intern: “There should be a vending machine for toiletries with aspirin, tissues and stuff in it.” CJP believes the suggestion is a good one. Since jurors are often required to remain in the courthouses for hours at a time, and because the elderly, amongst others, may find it a challenge to leave the buildings even during the lunch break, having basic items available could be very convenient for jurors.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During January, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 26 jurors with 28 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (13). Five (5) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

100 Centre Street: During January, 57 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 62 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (32). Twelve (12) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One juror offered these appreciative comments: *“My experience has been great. People of all ages make it a more enjoyable experience. Access to WI-FI and coffee shows that there is more appreciation for jurors.”*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During January, 12 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 12 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (9).

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During January, 20 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 22 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). There were five (5) suggestions, including that “A light [should be installed] to blink outside [in the hallway] when they have to tell us something important”. CJP has shared essentially the same suggestion as a General Recommendation in an earlier report. Four (4) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. A juror made the following appreciative comment: *“His [Walter’s] sense of humor helps everything - its terrific - changes the experience.”*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During January, 58 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 61 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (20). Ten (10) questions involved the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were nine (9) complaints; however, none of them are deemed worth reporting on further (e.g. “jury service is boring.”). Seven (7) late jurors approached interns, and six (6) jurors had questions about postponements and difficulty with jury service.

360 Adams Street: During January, 53 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 56 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (17). Another fifteen (15) questions came from jurors who arrived late.⁵ Thirteen (13) jurors asked questions in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One juror offered the appreciative comment that he or she was “treated well” and that the “facility is nice”.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During January, 37 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 39 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (25). Five (5) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During January, 46 jurors approached interns with 48 questions. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (21). Nine (9) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were eight (8) juror complaints, none of which CJP deems worth reporting on further. For instance, one juror was upset about being called to serve on the day of the President's inauguration.

Westchester

111 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.: During January, 42 jurors approached interns with 43 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (27). Seven (7) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

¹ While booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week, there are exceptions. In the Bronx and 60 Centre Street, 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 pm. Additionally, interns occasionally report that jurors have been discharged early, meaning, of course, that there is no one left to approach them.

² Due to the New Years holiday falling on a Thursday, jurors were not called to serve until Monday, January 5th. Martin Luther King Day also decreased the number of jurors called, as Monday is usually a busy day for "new" jurors. In regard to CJP interns, several new ones were hired, and their orientation and training took place between January 5th and 9th.

³ 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?"

⁴ 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?"

⁵ 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.