



Citizens Jury Project Report November 2009

Summary

In November 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.¹ The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In November, 627 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 662 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 seven (7) CJP sites in November 2009.² At two (2) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³

General Recommendation – Additional Explanations Regarding Who is Called to Serve: Based on the number of comments in this report (and past reports) to the effect that “Others (volunteers; retirees, welfare recipients, etc.) should be called to serve.” CJP suggests that it might be worthwhile for court personnel to explain the importance of summoning a cross-section of the community to serve – something that would not be accomplished by only calling volunteers, and the like.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During November, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 47 jurors with 48 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (45).

100 Centre Street: During November, 61 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 65 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (35). Fifteen (15) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Four (4) questions had to do with qualifications to serve. Suggestions included that, “*Jury duty should be for retired people only and not for working people. Retired people have more time on their hands.*”; “*Jury service should be voluntary. There's pressure on people who don't feel like they should judge. I won't be able to make up my mind.*”; and another, “*It should be voluntary.*”

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During November, 58 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 (31). Fifteen (15) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Three (3) questions had to do with postponement or difficulty with jury service. One juror suggested an exemption for people with children.

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During November, 36 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 38 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (23). Five (5) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. A juror suggested that, *“The summons should include that jurors must serve for at least two days.”* Another juror suggested an alternative procedure for summoning jurors to serve.⁴

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During November, 74 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 77 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (48). Ten (10) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. Seven (7) late jurors approached interns. Five (5) questions were about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

360 Adams Street: During November, 25 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 26 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (8). Six (6) questions were asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Six (6) late jurors approached interns.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During November, 180 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 186 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (77). Forty-three (43) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Thirty-seven questions (37) were asked regarding postponements and difficulty in serving. One juror suggested that, *“People who do not work should be chosen for jury duty, like the people on welfare.”* A juror offered appreciative comments, saying that, *“I like the wi-fi here. This building is much nicer than 851.”*

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During November, 62 jurors approached interns with 67 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (42). Thirteen (13) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were five appreciative comments, including, *“I like the changes that have been made. The televisions, computers, new*

chairs, etc.”; and, “I like the fact that you have given jurors muffins and juice.” (Comment made during juror appreciation week).

Nassau County

Mineola: During November, 85 jurors approached interns with 90 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (45). Twenty-nine (29) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Five (5) questions were asked in regard to postponements and difficulty in serving. Suggestions included, “*They should have a change machine by the newspapers.*”; “*They should [show] a new movie in the beginning; Judith Kaye isn't the Chief Justice anymore.*”; “*They should leave jury duty up to the unemployed, I am self-employed so I can't afford to miss work.*”; “*They should have a list of names shown so that if we step out or go to the cafeteria, when we come back we know if our name has been called.*”; and, “[A]ll companies should be required . . . to pay employees who are serving their full pay. [C]ompanies should then be able to put that money as a tax deduction. Once loss of pay has been removed across the board, the jury duty process will go a lot more smoothly.”

Grand Jury

One Hogan Place: CJP received a remarkable letter from a juror who had recently served. Due to the length of this letter, it is being included as an addendum. In it, the juror expresses her great appreciation to Grand Jury Warden Michael Siano for his kindness and assistance.

Courthouses Not Given

Two of the comments received via the virtual ombudservice were:

I am 75 years old. Though I have no serious health problems, it was quite arduous for me to have to take the subway to and from jury duty on a jammed train at rush hour. I believe there should be some consideration for older adults, and a cut-off age for service somewhere around 70 without needing a doctor's letter.

I love jury duty, especially grand jury. Grand jury should be mandatory for people between the ages of 18-24. This way they will understand what mischief can lead to. It is an education.

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 Mineola 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 The juror said,

May I suggest an "alternate" process which would on Day 1 call to service jurors names A-M (half the alphabet) and this should be stated on the summons. If this group is NOT called to serve by end of morning session they could be released for the remainder of the day. After lunch an afternoon session would summon jurors N-Z and likewise if they are not called by end of day would return the following day for "afternoon session" only. On day 2, the names A-M would be required to return for "morning session."

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