



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a cross-section of society, jurors bring a diversity of experiences and concerns to the courts and can effectively guide court response and reform. In order to continue to improve on the administration of justice in New York State, jurors' ideas and concerns must be heard and responded to.

Privacy, an issue that has been widely discussed and debated in the wake of September 11, 2001, is an issue that also concerns jurors, whose identities and characteristics are exposed and examined in the process of participation. The first part of the Citizens Jury Project Spring 2003 report examines this issue, at both the state and federal level, and provides recommendations based on that analysis and informed by our advocacy for jurors in NY courts.

The second part of the Spring 2003 report provides a detailed analysis of 543 comments collected from jurors interviewed during the time period of December 1, 2002 to March 31, 2003. Accompanying this analysis are recommendations that have been informed by jurors' comments and our ongoing presence at 60, 100, and 111 Centre Street courthouses in Manhattan, and 360 Adams Street in Brooklyn.

RECOMENDATIONS

Provide jurors with detailed information about where to report during all phases of service, and provide more procedural information throughout the process.

In order to alleviate juror confusion during the voir dire process or while serving on a panel, New York and Kings County courts must provide explicit information about where jurors should report while serving. Jurors should also be more informed about their rights, and have a clear understanding of the process of serving. Lessening juror confusion and stress will diminish jurors' feeling of "wasted time" and will promote comprehension during proceedings

Address juror privacy concerns.

- Ensure that a judge or J.H.O. (for civil trials) is present during voir dire.
- Create standards that guide the procedure by which judges address juror privacy concerns
- Utilize the Judicial Institute as a forum to teach judges about how to address juror privacy in New York courts.
- Address juror privacy in literature and materials provided to jurors.
- Continue to assess and address jurors' safety concerns.
- Dialogue with the press about the treatment of jurors post-verdict.

Target environmental improvements in the courts.

Jurors clearly respond to improvements made to the physical conditions within our courts. Courts must continually assess whether their facilities are accessible and safe. Timely response to the recommendations provided in the report will help to create clean and safe court environments.

Reconsider the possibility of offering child care reimbursement to jurors.

CJP consistently encounters caretakers in each courthouse who express concern about the burden that service puts on their lives, their families, and the children that they care for. In section 8 of this report, CJP details five states' (District of Columbia, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Minnesota) child care reimbursement schemes for jurors, and the information that CJP collected in interviews with court officials and administrators from each state. In these interviews, state officials reported that the child care reimbursement promotes inclusion, and represents a minute portion of their total jury budgets.

Public Outreach

- Provide multi-lingual information about the courts and court processes in court literature and on the Unified Court System website.
- Include a line on the qualification questionnaire in each county's predominant languages, which instructs non-English speakers to call a hotline that will provide information and instructions in their native languages.
- Create toll-free information lines with recorded instructions for summoned non-English speakers
- Increase communication between the courts and the press that report and publish in languages other than English.
- Create public service announcements that are multilingual and draw from the theme of diversity, a requirement for an effective jury system and a reality in New York.
- Address unemployment concerns in the juror handbook and on the Unified Court System's website.
- Collaborate with other state systems and the private sector to promote jury service and positive practices in relation to service.

Future Research

Expand research and analysis to include the non-compliant and disqualified juror populations. Research has indicated that non-respondents generally want to serve but that personal responsibilities/hardship and misconceptions about service inhibit their response. A state-specific assessment of non-compliant and disqualified jurors can allow for a more in-depth analysis of many of the issues brought up in this report. Such an analysis will further clarify where gaps in information exist, and how the system can best accommodate individuals with personal hardship and responsibilities that inhibit their ability to serve and contribute to the system.

CONCLUSION

The Citizens Jury Project encourages the Unified Court System to implement the preceding recommendations. It is our hope that this and other CJP reports provide a framework that can be built upon. We look forward to continued collaborative work with the Office of Court Administration and courts throughout the state.

