



**Citizens Jury Project Report
July 2007
Summary**

In July 2007, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice Booths in seven (7) courthouse locations in New York City, in order to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience.ⁱ During this period, 702 jurors approached CJP with 806 questions or comments; the number of jurors reporting at all courthouse locations was 14,474.ⁱⁱ The booths were staffed by trained interns from six to twelve hours in the mornings each week.

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to CJP at each site along with suggestions for improvement, where appropriate, and a set of general recommendations.

Inquiries about the location of facilities and amenities (restrooms, food and beverages, etc.) or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse were the most common juror questions at five (5) CJP sites in July 2007. At the other two (2) CJP sites, the most frequent questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

General Recommendations:

1. **Updated Signage or Guides:** Modern state-of-the-art signage using visually-familiar icons would benefit many jurors. Signage should be located in frequently-trafficked areas.
2. **Additional language assistance:** (a) Counties should consider automated multilingual juror help lines, using state-of-the-art multilingual mailbox messaging. (b) On its homepage, nyjuror.gov should include multiple-language links, describing qualifications and legitimate reasons for postponements and excusals. (c) Jury summons should add abbreviated multilingual notices of Internet or phone information. We understand that OCA is in the process of developing a poster and handouts in multiple languages explaining the basic qualifications for jury service. Once available this handout will also be reproduced at NYJUROR.gov.

- 3. Temperature in jury assembly rooms:** In a few courthouses, some jurors report that the temperature is uncomfortable. CJP suggests that an assessment be done at these courthouses to determine whether the issue is one construction or of the cooling system. Every effort should be made to address this problem so that all jurors are comfortable. We thank one of the jurors for this suggestion.

New York County

60 Centre Street: In July of 2007, the CJP Ombudservice Booth was approached by 56 jurors with 71 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse (22 inquiries). Significantly, there were fourteen (14) appreciative comments.¹ **Recommendation:** *Consider commendation to courthouse staff for positive service. See General Recommendation 1, at the beginning of this report.*

100 Centre Street: In July of 2007, 119 jurors approached the Ombudservice Booth with 129 questions and comments. The most frequent questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse (73). Fifteen (15) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.² There were nine (9) complaints, seven regarding courthouse facilities.³ CJP recognizes that OCA has limited capacity to address certain facilities issues. **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 3, at the beginning of this report.*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: No jurors called in July.

¹ Appreciative comments from jurors included the following: “I think they are trying and I like the fact they have made it every six year to serve instead of every four.”; “I think it's an honor to serve. I like the seating, the clerk, and the court.”; and, “I feel blessed to be here. As an immigrant, I appreciate the ‘Due Process’ concept and am happy to serve.” Another juror said that service was more comfortable, and the staff was more respectful.

² Juror questions about procedure included: “How long will I be here today?”; “What do I do?” (from a late juror); “How long is the orientation?”; “Can jurors use their cell phones in the halls?”; and “What time is lunch?”. Another juror asked if she could go outside to smoke a cigarette.

³ Complaints included: not enough and uncomfortable chairs; payphones not working; and, the hallway being too hot.

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: In July of 2007, the CJP Ombudservice addressed 161 comments and questions from 127 jurors. The most frequently asked questions concerned location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse (55). Significantly, there were seventeen (17) appreciative comments.⁴ **Recommendation:** *Consider commendation to courthouse staff for positive service. See General Recommendation 1, at the beginning of this report.*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: In July of 2007, 75 jurors approached the booth and raised 85 questions and comments. Twenty-two (22) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.⁵ There were also sixteen (16) complaints⁶ many of which were unrelated to the courthouse or personnel.⁷ **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 3.*

Bronx County

In July of 2007, 235 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice Booth with 260 questions and comments. This large increase from June, when 60 jurors approached with 66 questions, is partly explained by the fact that in June, interns took part in the CJP orientation, and began operating the booths in the middle of the month. The most common questions (144) concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. Thirty six (36) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.⁸ Notably, there were only three (complaints). **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 1, at the beginning of this report.*

⁴ Appreciative comments included ones about the clerks, comfortable seats, orientation film and CJP lunch guide.

⁵ Amongst the questions about procedure were: “When will they call names again? I want to go out for a smoke break but don't want to miss it.”; and, what to do with the summons.

⁶ Five (5) complaints were in regard to facilities, and included: Jurors said speakers were low (jurors were concerned their names had been called). Jurors said room was too cold.

⁷ Some of these complaints: Juror objected to the lack of reimbursement for food or transportation. Juror thought the video's comment about the power of jury service when compared to voting was not well advised. Other jurors said: “I am self-employed, and my business is closed. The clerk told me I had to serve today.”; “Pay is miserable.”; “Too much sitting around.”; “Boring.”; and, “Waste of time”.

⁸ Juror questions about procedure included: what to do with the summons; “Do they ask you some questions before they put you on a jury - when they call your name?”; “My mother keeps getting summonses. She is not a citizen and she doesn't speak English. How can I tell them to stop sending them?”; “I am very late. I am so sorry about that. What should I do?”; and, “When they will start calling jurors?”

Queens County

Kew Gardens: In July of 2007, CJP staff recorded 82 questions and comments from 72 jurors. The most frequent questions (20) concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. There were also sixteen (16) complaints,⁹ many of which were unrelated to the courthouse or personnel.¹⁰

Jamaica: In July of 2007, 18 jurors approached the booth with 18 questions and comments. The most frequent questions (7) concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.¹¹ CJP believes that the low number of juror comments and questions is due to: 1) the CJP booth's location in the back of the jury room, out of sight for most jurors; and 2) clerks not announcing that an intern is there, and why.¹²

i Booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week; the Bronx booth is operated two days per week. No jurors were called in July at 111 Centre Street 3rd Floor.

ii Number of jurors reporting by courthouse in July of 2007:

60 Centre Street	1,904;
100 Centre Street	2,125;
111 Centre Street, 11th Fl.	1,566;
320 Jay Street	2,616;
Bronx	2,625;
Kew Gardens	1,445;
<u>Jamaica</u>	<u>2,193.</u>

⁹ Complaints included the following: "I don't think we should be subjected to a room full of televisions blaring with no escape!"; "Do all the TV's have to be on the same channel?"; "We don't get enough information."; "The court officers treat us like children and are condescending - but we are adults!"; and, "There should be more signs - especially ones directing you to report at the side entrance of [the courthouse] - because you assume you have to go to main entrance." (The latter three came from the same juror.)

¹⁰ Some complaints: "My husband served on jury duty last year. He still has not . . . received payment"; "I feel that jury duty service is a large inconvenience to the working population that is dependent upon their income to live and survive."; "I live in South Queens, much closer to Brooklyn, yet I have to travel for an hour and a half to get to this Queens courthouse. I shouldn't have to serve in Queens courthouse, especially since I'm much closer to Brooklyn."

¹¹ Juror questions about procedure and what they could do included: "We can eat in here right?"; "Do I have to pay to use the computers?"; "[W]hen are they going to let me leave?"; and "Can I go outside for a break?"

¹² In every other courthouse, the CJP booth is in a good or adequate location vis-à-vis the jurors, and/or clerks let jurors know that an intern from CJP is available for questions, comments, suggestions and complaints. In spite of discussions with court personnel, as this report is being written in early October, interns say that announcements still are not always made, and the ones that are made are like the following: There's somewhere here from the Citizens Jury Project if you have questions. Or even, If you have questions, you can go to the back [of the assembly room]. In our opinion, interns are not being allowed to fully perform their jobs. Moreover, jurors are being denied the full opportunity to express themselves. Since interns say they find the facilities to be very good and the court well run, the interference with intern activities is especially puzzling. In any case, if interns cannot serve more jurors in Jamaica, both intern time and OCA dollars can be better spent.

TOTAL:

14,474
