



## **Citizens Jury Project Report October 2008**

### **Summary**

In October of 2008, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in ten (10) courthouse locations in New York City for six to twelve hours per week.<sup>1</sup> (An ombudservice booth was moved from one Bronx courthouse to another. Interns worked at both locations at different times of the month, and reference is made to both courthouses in this report. In addition, CJP began operating a booth in White Plains.)

The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In October, 668 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 695 questions or comments.

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to CJP at each site. It also includes two 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 eight (8) CJP sites in October of 2008.<sup>2</sup> At the remaining two (2) sites, 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.<sup>3</sup>

### **General Recommendation**

**Best Practices:** An intern working at the Kew Gardens courthouse has informed CJP that a poster has been placed outside the jury building next to the entrance. The poster is an actual jury summons, but larger. In the past, many jurors have been confused as to where to enter the building. This simple step should greatly help to address the issue. Any courthouse where there is a need to better identify where jurors should enter can adopt this or a similar practice.

**Change Machines:** CJP recommends that consideration be given to installing change machines in courthouses that do not already have them. An alternative is to have vending machines that accept dollar bills. This addition will relieve the need of some jurors wishing to exit the building for snacks and beverages.

## **New York County**

**60 Centre Street:** During October, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 85 jurors with 88 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (48). Fifteen (15) concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Another fifteen (15) juror questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving. There were two appreciative comments.<sup>4</sup>

**100 Centre Street:** During October, 144 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 149 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (90). Seventeen (17) juror questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving, and fourteen (14) were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Interns also recorded five (5) appreciative comments.<sup>5</sup>

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** During October, 18 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 18 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). Four (4) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

**111 Centre Street, 11th floor:** During October, 48 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 51 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (24). Eleven (11) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

## **Kings County**

**320 Jay Street:** During October, 114 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 118 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (34). Twenty-one (21) questions involved the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Fifteen (15) jurors asked questions regarding postponements or difficulty in serving.

**360 Adams Street:** During October, 107 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 112 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (46). Twenty-five (25) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Twenty (20) late jurors approached interns. Interns recorded six (6) computer related questions and three (3) appreciative comments.<sup>6</sup>

## **Bronx County**

**851 Grand Concourse:** From October 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>,<sup>7</sup> 36 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 36 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (13). Eleven (11) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and three (3) concerned postponement and difficulty with jury service.

**215 East 161st Street:** Between October 6<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 44 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 46 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (22). Sixteen (16) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Six (6) questions involved postponement and difficulty with jury service.

### Queens County

**Kew Gardens:** During October, 33 jurors approached interns with 35 questions and comments from. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (26). There were two (2) appreciative comments.<sup>8</sup>

### Westchester

**111 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd:** Between October 6<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 41 jurors approached interns with 42 questions and comments. The most common questions 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, and seven (7) involved postponement and difficulty with jury service.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 pm. Additionally, interns occasionally report that jurors have been discharged early, meaning, of course, that there is no one left to approach them.

<sup>2</sup> 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?"

<sup>3</sup> 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?"

<sup>4</sup> One of the appreciative comments was, "Just wanted to complement you on professional staff, convenience, access to restrooms, food, internet, reading material; a very impressive waiting area..."

<sup>5</sup> Appreciative comments included, "(Jury duty is) a more pleasurable experience. The guy (Larry) and judges runs everything good."; and, "It has gotten better. I have been serving since the 70's, and then you were called every two years."

<sup>6</sup> The appreciative comments included, "The process is much better than when I last served" (The juror noted the seats and internet access in particular); and, "The WiFi here is fantastic."

<sup>7</sup> The ombudservice booth was moved to the new Bronx Criminal Courthouse located at 215 East 161st Street in early October.

<sup>8</sup> The appreciative comments included, "My experience has been wonderful. I feel very content with the clerks, judges and lawyers. I did not get selected for a case, but I hope I will next time I serve."; and "I think the magazine stand is very useful for jurors."