

Citizens Jury Project
Spring 2001 Report on Juror Concerns:
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Preface

The Citizens Jury Project (CJP) was created in 1995 following the recommendation of the Jury Project, a blue-ribbon panel formed by New York State Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye to review and reform jury service in New York State. The CJP serves as an advocate for individual jurors in the courts, and strives to make systemic reforms that improve conditions for all jurors.

Ombudservice booths, staffed by student interns—currently from Emory University, Yale University, and Vassar College—are the in-court presence of the project. At these booths, interns help jurors with individual concerns and problems, and gather the data presented in these reports through juror interviews. The booths are located outside the jury assembly rooms at 60, 100, and 111 Centre Street in Manhattan, and 360 Adams Street in Brooklyn.

In our December 2000 report, we focused on the need for improved technology in the courts—Manhattan jurors especially demand resources like increased internet access and a more efficient call-in system. This report examines the major problem underlying jurors' requests for tech and work resources—the impact of jury service on their professional lives and incomes. Included in this report are the nearly 1,400 comments from the more than 750 jurors interviewed since November 1, 2000.

We are rapidly approaching our 10,000th juror interview. The jury system has come a long way—jurors tell us so—but challenges remain. We are confident that with the continued support of the Office of Court Administration, we will be able to further advance the goal of the original Jury Project—to establish a jury system that values, and is valued by, its jurors.

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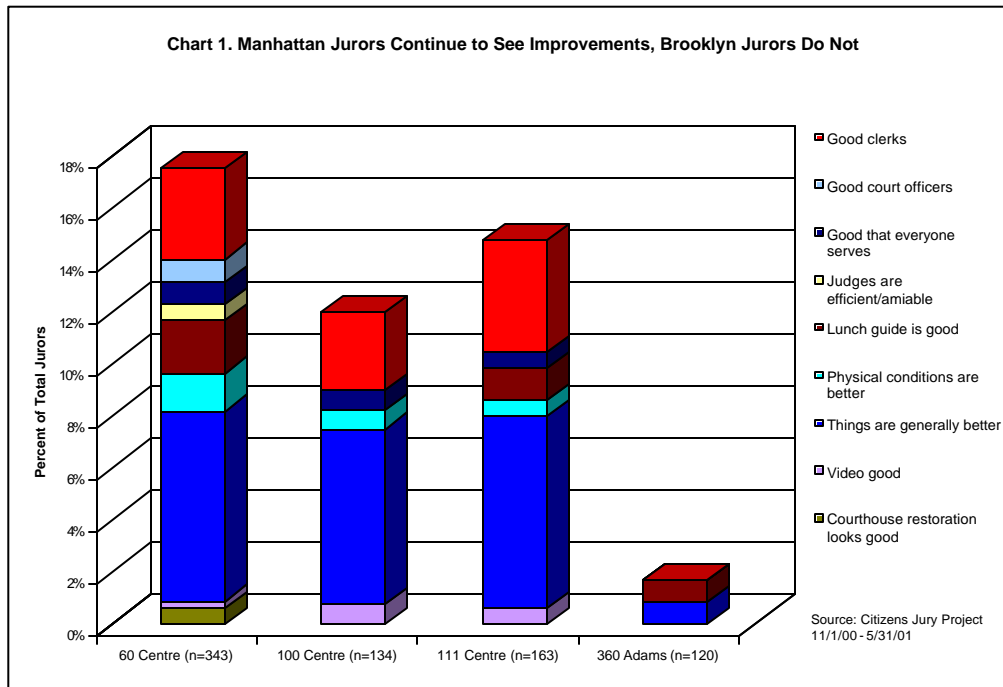
1. New York City Juror Comments: An Overview

New York City jurors are New Yorkers first, and jurors second. They are free with their opinions and have high expectations for court facilities and the organization of the jury system. They notice the good—polite and helpful clerks, courthouse restoration, and shorter terms of service. And they complain about the bad—wasted time in jury assembly or voir dire rooms, run-down and poorly maintained facilities, lack of simple amenities, and inadequate technology. These complaints exacerbate jurors’ resentment at being pulled away from their work and families, a constant comment since the Citizens Jury Project began in 1995.

The charts and tables in this report reflect data gathered from the four Ombuds service booths (60 Centre Street, 100 Centre Street, 111 Centre Street, and 360 Adams Street) and the on-line Ombuds service (www.juryproject.org). Data about disqualified jurors (e.g. non-citizens, former felons) was removed and is presented in Appendix B.

(a) Appreciative comments

Jurors continued to comment on improvements in the courts (Chart 1). “Things are generally better” (in bright blue) was the most common positive comment, with praise for the jury clerks at all Manhattan courthouses (red) a close second. Other jurors expressed appreciation for improved physical conditions at some courthouses (aqua). Some jurors also praised the changes to the summoning regulations that now require all New Yorkers to serve (dark blue). Brooklyn jurors’ positive comments decreased—the praise for clerks, noted last report, dropped out entirely.



(b) All juror comments

Many jurors made positive comments about the courts—more efficient and pleasant clerks, better physical conditions, and general appreciation (Chart 2). However, jurors increasingly commented that jury service is a burden to their professional and personal lives (sea-green). Many had difficulty with the summoning procedures and rules (blue). Comments about poor physical conditions (pink) and inadequate technology (yellow) were also common.



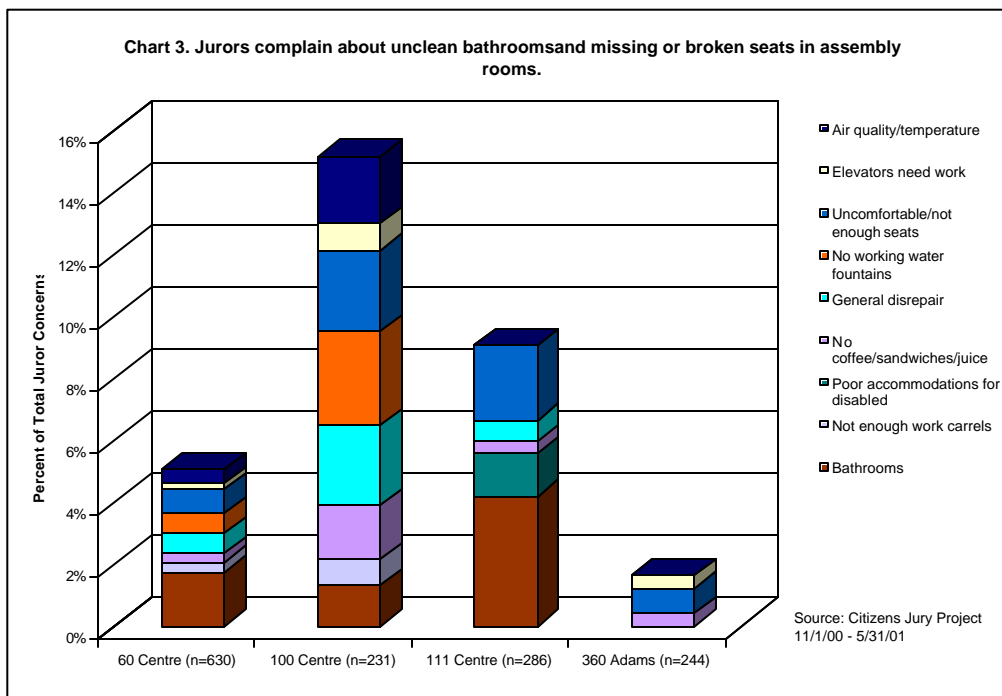
(c) Physical conditions

The Office of Court Administration (OCA) assumed financial responsibility for the maintenance of the city-owned courthouses in April 2001. The impact of this transition has not yet been felt. Juror complaints about physical conditions in this report will serve as the starting point for the improvements OCA will hopefully make to the physical conditions of the courts.

The lack of clean, serviceable bathrooms and working water fountains drew complaints from Manhattan jurors (Chart 3). Jurors at all courthouses—especially 360 Adams and 111 Centre—commented that there were not enough seats for jurors. 100 Centre received the worst reviews from jurors, although comments about the notoriously bad elevators inexplicably all but disappeared this winter.¹

¹ Although juror comments about the bad elevators were down, the Citizens Jury Project staff noticed no improvements in elevator service, nor did an investigation reveal any changes.

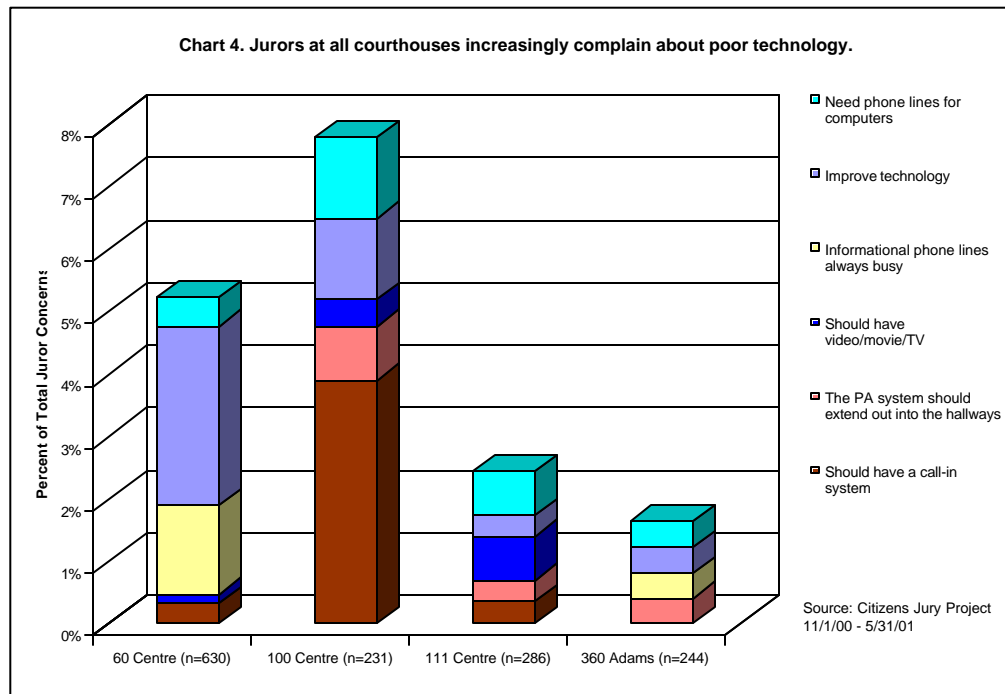
Jurors continued, as highlighted in the New York Times,² to complain about the lack of coffee and amenities in and near the assembly rooms (light purple). Even the concession stand at 60 Centre drew criticism, as unannounced closures of the stand left many high and dry. Many also complained about the quality of the coffee—one juror ranted about health code violations. This problem has become chronic although its solution should be so simple.



(d) Technology

Jurors at all courthouses commented on the lack of technology resources (Chart 4). Jurors frequently asked for Internet ports so they could work and communicate during long waits in the assembly rooms (light blue)—an improvement that would help alleviate the stress jurors feel when separated from their professions. Jurors at all Manhattan courts said that a call-in system would also be less burdensome (dark red). Jurors we spoke with at 60 Centre and 360 Adams—the hub courthouses for Manhattan and Brooklyn—complained that informational phone lines were constantly busy (yellow).

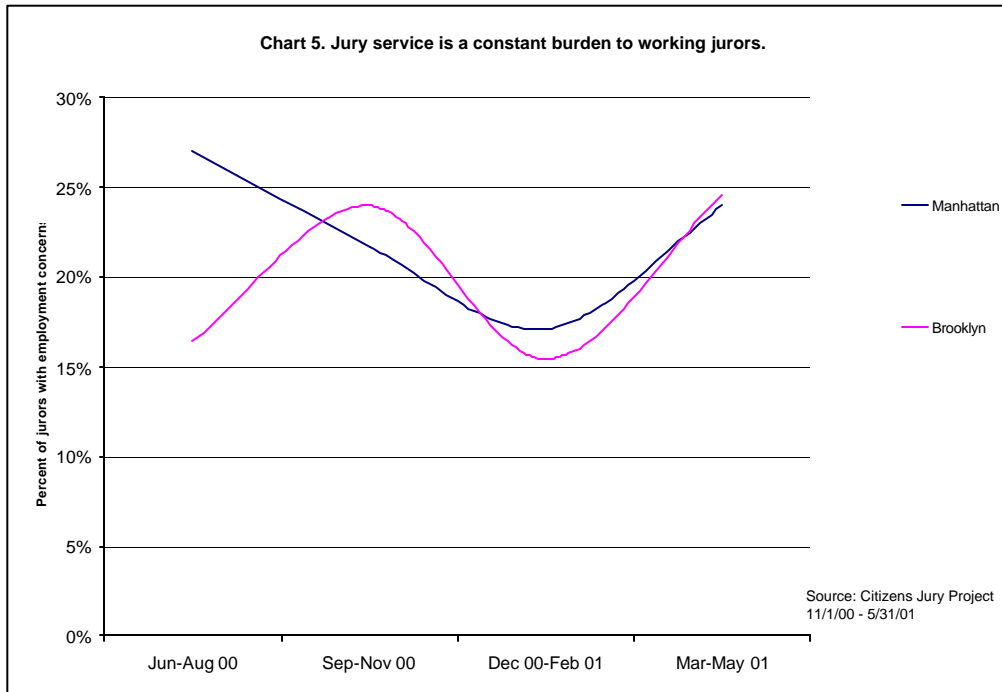
² Katherine E. Finkelstein, “More Lean, Less Mean, Floors Swept And So Clean; Having Hot Coffee Helps Bring Order In the Court,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 2001,



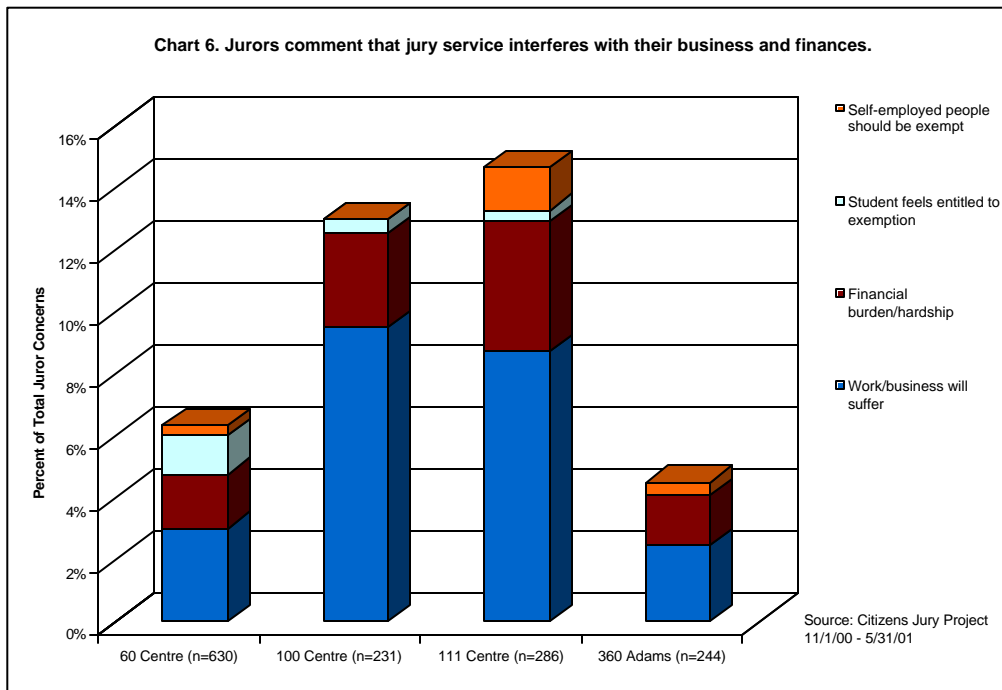
(e) Personal and professional burdens

New Yorkers live busy lives and have multiple responsibilities. Although few jurors we spoke to said they should be exempt from serving, many thought jury service is a waste of their precious time—long waits, the lack of a call-in system, inflexible scheduling, and multiple-day service all compound the problem. Most jurors who commented on the 1996 elimination of professional exemptions favored that reform.

Being pulled away from their work and careers is difficult for many jurors (Chart 5). Such complaints have been noted repeatedly since the formation of the Citizens Jury Project—over the last year, employment concerns have been consistently high (12% - 35%).



Jury service remained a burden on jurors' professional lives (Chart 6). Jurors away from their jobs worried about their finances and the state of their businesses (gray-blue). Sole-proprietors and owners of small businesses were especially anxious (orange). Some students felt that service unreasonably interfered with their classes.



2. 60 Centre Street

(a) Summary of juror concerns

“Things are generally better” was the top appreciative comment at 60 Centre, with “good clerks” second. Despite increased complaints about physical conditions generally, some jurors said the physical conditions improved—most often in response to courthouse restoration.

Lack of information remained the most common critical concern, followed by summoning problems—many jurors reported that they had been summoned within four years of their last service. Others complained that they were called too frequently while friends or family were never called. Medical and family issues were common as well.

Top Juror Concerns—60 Centre Street	
11/1/00-5/31/01	
(Total Concerns = 630)	
Top 5 Appreciative Concerns	Count
Things are generally better	25
Good clerks	12
Lunch guide is good	7
Physical conditions are better	5
Good court officers	3
Top 10 Critical Concerns	Count
Lack of information/incorrect information	84
Would like a postponement/deferral	48
Disproportionate summoning	30
Summoned w/in two years of Aug. 1998	22
Medical problem/old age	20
Improve technology	18
Elder/childcare	16
Needed information ahead of time	14
Wasted time	13
Very disruptive to my work	10

(b) Breakdown of juror concerns

Although there were again few criticisms of the physical conditions at 60 Centre, the bathrooms outside the main jury assembly room remained a problem. Many jurors complained about the unevenly maintained bathrooms—mostly about the lack of paper towels, toilet paper, and soap.

60 Centre: Physical Conditions	Count
Bathrooms	11
Not enough/uncomfortable seats	5
General disrepair	4
No working water fountains	4
Air quality/temperature	3
Need bike racks	2
No coffee/sandwiches/juice	2
Noise	2
Not enough work carrels	2
Not safe – firetrap	2

Jurors increasingly commented on the poor technology in the courts. Busy informational phone lines with no voicemail or waiting queue infuriated jurors who are trying to fit jury service into their busy schedules. Jurors also expected internet access while waiting in the assembly rooms.

60 Centre: Technology	Count
Improve technology	18
Informational phone lines always busy	9
Need phone lines for computers	3
Should have a call-in system	2

Jurors who felt they served more often than others complained about disproportionate summoning. Specifically, jurors who served after August 1998 complained when summoned within two years, after having been promised a four-year exemption.

60 Centre: Summoning & orientation	Count
Would like a postponement/deferral	48
Disproportionate summoning	30
Summoned w/in two years of Aug. 1998	22
Problems with name or address	11
In non-compliance	7
Received multiple summons	7

Jurors resented having their time wasted, especially those who felt the courts could be more flexible with how and when they schedule jurors.

60 Centre: Administration of service	Count
Wasted time	13
Service should be more flexible/accommodating	9
Service is too long	4

While praise for good clerks was common, comments that some clerks were unhelpful or rude remained.

60 Centre: Incivility	Count
Clerks are unhelpful/rude	6
Court officers are unhelpful	1
Lawyers are rude	1
Rude judges	1

Financial and employment burdens continued to be a problem.

60 Centre: Financial/Employment Burden	Count
Very disruptive to my work	10
Student feels entitled to exemption	8
Am losing major work assignments	4
Concern of unhappiness by employer	3
Doctors should be exempt	2
My business will suffer	2
My students will suffer	2
Self-employed people should be exempt	2

Improved flexibility and technology could help ease the burden on jurors with medical concerns or family members to care for.

60 Centre: Family/Health Burden	Count
Medical problem/old age	20
Elder/childcare	16
Need to pick up children	3
Elderly should not have to serve	2

60 Centre: Voir dire	Count
Should be pre-screening	4
Object to name being called in front of defendants	2
Refuse to choose attorneys/paralegals/law enforce	2
Time wasted by attorneys	2

3. 100 Centre Street

(a) Summary of juror concerns

“Things were generally better” was the most common positive comment at 100 Centre. As usual, the good-natured clerks were appreciated. Only one juror had anything good to say about the physical conditions—she commented that the open window in the bathrooms was a nice break from the stuffy assembly rooms.

Critical comments focused on the burdens of jury service—jurors commented that their time was wasted, that serving interfered with their careers, and that the court could be more flexible and accommodating to avoid these burdens.

Top Juror Concerns—100 Centre Street	
11/1/00-5/31/01	
(Total Concerns = 231)	
Top 5 Appreciative Concerns	Count
Things are generally better	9
Good clerks	4
Good that everyone serves	1
Physical conditions are better	1
Video good	1
Top 10 Critical Concerns	Count
Wasted time	13
Would like a postponement/deferral	11
Very disruptive to my work	10
Should have a call-in system	10
Things are generally better	9
Lack of information/incorrect information	9
Service should be more flexible/accommodating	8
Elder/childcare	8
No working water fountains	7
Religious/personal objection	7

(b) Breakdown of juror concerns

Jurors complained about the crowded, hot, stuffy jury room during the winter months. These problems were compounded by the lack of working water fountains—the only operational one is hidden away in the juror lounge. Beyond their basic need for water, jurors also commented that more accessible coffee “like they have at 60 Centre” would be appreciated.

100 Centre: Physical Conditions	Count
No working water fountains	7
General disrepair	6
Not enough seats	6
Air quality/temperature	5
No coffee/sandwiches/juice	4
Bathrooms	3
Elevators need work	2
Not enough work carrels	2

Jurors frequently asked about call-in systems, which they said would make scheduling jury service much easier. Some jurors requested phone jacks for laptop computers.

100 Centre: Technology	Count
Should have a call-in system	10
Improve technology	3
Need phone lines for computers	3
The PA system should extend out into the hallways	2

Jury service continued to be a burden to those with work responsibilities.

100 Centre: Financial/Employment Burden	Count
Very disruptive to my work	10
Am losing major work assignments	5
My business will suffer	3
My students will suffer	3
Financial hardship	3
Pay is not enough	3

Those with medical concerns, or with elderly family members or small children to care for, found jury service to be a burden.

100 Centre: Family/Health Burden	Count
Medical problem	20
Elder/childcare	8

Trial jurors were generally pleased with their experience. Some resented sequestration for petty cases.

100 Centre: Trial	Count
Good/OK experience	4
Sequestration difficult/unfair/outrageous	2

Wasted time remained a problem. Many jurors commented that jury service should be made more accommodating—either by adopting a one-day-one-trial policy or creating a more flexible schedule.

100 Centre: Administration	Count
Wasted time	13
Service should be more flexible/accommodating	8
Not enough cases for jurors	4
Service is too long	3
Adopt one-day-one-trial rule	2

4. 111 Centre Street

(a) Summary of juror concerns

Jurors at 111 Centre commented that things were generally better; many praised the excellent clerks.

Lack of information, work and financial hardship, and physical conditions were the common problems at 111 Centre.

Top Juror Concerns—111 Centre Street	
11/1/00-5/31/01	
(Total Concerns = 286)	
Top 5 Appreciative Concerns	Count
Things are generally better	12
Good clerks	7
Lunch guide is good	2
Good that everyone serves	1
Physical conditions are better	1
Top 10 Critical Concerns	Count
Would like a postponement/deferral	30
Lack of information/incorrect information	20
Very disruptive to my work	14
Bathrooms	13
Medical problem/old age	12
Elder/childcare	8
Financial hardship	8
Summoned w/in two years of Aug. 1998	8
Wasted time	8
Disproportionate summoning	7

(b) Breakdown of juror concerns

Jurors said service is a burden to their professional lives, especially those who were self-employed.

111 Centre: Financial/Employment Burden	Count
Very disruptive to my work	14
Financial hardship	8
My business will suffer	6
Am losing major work assignments	4
Self-employed people should be exempt	4
Concern of unhappiness by employer	3
Severe financial hardship	2

Likewise, jurors with medical problems and family responsibilities commented that service was a burden.

111 Centre: Family/Health Burden	Count
Medical problem/old age	12
Elder/childcare	8
Elderly should not have to serve	5
Need to pick up children	3

Jurors commented readily about dirty bathrooms and the lack of adequate seating at 111 Centre.

111 Centre: Physical Conditions	Count
Bathrooms	12
Not enough/Uncomfortable seats	7
Poor accommodations for disabled	4
General disrepair	2

Again, low-tech courts did not impress Manhattan jurors.

111 Centre: Technology	Count
Need phone lines for computers	2
Should have video/movie/TV	2
Video is bad	2

Jurors complained when summoned within four years of their last service, or when they received multiple summons under slightly different spellings of their name.

111 Centre: Summoning	Count
Would like a postponement/deferral	30
Summoned w/in two years of Aug. 1998	8
Disproportionate summoning	7
Problems with name or address	5
Received multiple summons	5
Not fair - some people never called	4
In non-compliance	2

Again, jurors asked for increased flexibility with scheduling.

111 Centre: Administration	Count
Wasted time	6
Service should be more flexible/accommodating	4

5. 360 Adams Street

(a) Summary of juror concerns

Brooklyn received few appreciative comments—only four in a six-month period. Two grand jurors thought the grand jury was good; one juror said there were general improvements, and one liked the CJP lunch guide.

Complaints about medical problems and childcare difficulties remained disproportionately high in Brooklyn. Jurors also commented that their time was being wasted and that service interfered with their work.

Top Juror Concerns—111 Centre Street	
11/1/00-5/31/01	
(Total Concerns = 286)	
Top 3 Appreciative Concerns	Count
Grand jury is good	2
Things are generally better	1
Lunch guide is good	1
Top 10 Critical Concerns	Count
Lack of information/incorrect information	45
Elder/childcare	16
Medical problem/old age	15
Would like a postponement/deferral	11
Problems with name or address	7
Wasted time	6
Service should be more flexible/accommodating	4
Very disruptive to my work	4
Need to pick up children	4
General disrepair & dirt	4

(b) Breakdown of juror concerns

Comments about physical conditions in Brooklyn were very few. Some jurors commented that there were not enough seats; others asked for day care to help accommodate their family responsibilities.

360 Adams: Physical Conditions	Count
Not enough/Uncomfortable seats	2
Need daycare	2

Brooklyn jurors commented that jury service interfered with their job and financial security.

360 Adams: Financial/Employment Burden	Count
Very disruptive to my work	4
Am losing major work assignments	2
Financial hardship	2
Only get paid for hours worked	2

Brooklyn jurors with medical issues or family members to care for commented that jury service was a hardship.

360 Adams: Family/Health Burden	Count
Elder/childcare	16
Medical problem/old age	15
Need to pick up children	4

Although we haven't focused our efforts on Grand Jurors yet, those that encountered our booth at 360 Adams commented on the length of service and the hardship it caused to those with work responsibilities. Some said they enjoyed the experience.

360 Adams: Grand jury	Count
One month is too long	3
Grand jury is good	2
Very disruptive to my work	2

As in Manhattan, Brooklyn jurors complained when summoned too frequently.

360 Adams: Summoning	Count
Would like a postponement/deferral	11
Problems with name or address	7
Disproportionate summoning	4
In non-compliance	3
Summoned w/in two years of Aug. 1998	3
Would like to volunteer	3
Received multiple summons	2

6. Summary and Recommendations

Consistent with the findings of this project over the last six years, the primary complaints of jurors in the last six months centered around physical conditions, technology, and personal and professional burdens. While conditions have improved for jurors, the following recommendations would benefit jurors greatly and improve their trust in, and satisfaction with, the jury system.

- Target tangible improvements—cleaner physical conditions, basic amenities such as coffee near the assembly rooms, and increased technology. Jurors notice improvements, and comment on them. Focusing on short-term physical improvements will increase juror satisfaction. Now that OCA has financial control over the maintenance of the courts, the major obstruction to clean and well-kept courts has been removed.
- All public telephones near jury assembly rooms should be replaced with internet capable telephones. This places the cost of modernization on the phone companies, and provides an increasingly necessary service for jurors.
- The informational phone system should be updated to include a wait queue that announces the probable wait time. This will keep jurors from thinking that there is no one in the courts who can help them with their particular problem or question.
- Jurors should be informed, either on their summons, or through an informational recording on the informational phone lines, that they are able to choose the date of their service (within certain guidelines). Most jurors are unaware that they have this flexibility, and many have said this would have helped them schedule their businesses and personal lives.

APPENDIX A: All Manhattan Courts

Top Juror Concerns--All Manhattan Courts	
11/1/00 – 5/31/01	
(Total Concerns =1136)	
Top 10 Appreciative Concerns	Count
Things are generally better	46
Good clerks	23
Lunch guide is good	10
Physical conditions are better	7
Good that everyone serves	5
Trial was good/OK experience	5
Court officers are good	3
Video is good	3
Good judges	2
Courthouse restoration looks good	2
Top 25 Critical Concerns	Count
Lack of information/incorrect information	113
Would like a postponement/deferral	89
Disproportionate summoning	37
Medical problem/old age	37
Wasted time	36
Very disruptive to my work	35
Elder/childcare	32
Summoned w/in two years of Aug. 1998	30
Bathrooms	26
Needed information ahead of time	23
Improve technology	22
Service should be more flexible/accommodating	21
Not a resident of the county	17
Problems with name or address	17
Financial hardship	15
Religious/personal objection	15
Not enough seats	14
Am losing major work assignments	13
Received multiple summons	13
Should have a call-in system	13
General disrepair	12
My business will suffer	11
No working water fountains	11
Air quality/temperature	10
In non-compliance	10

APPENDIX B: Disqualifications

60 Centre: Disqualifications	Count
Doesn't speak English	31
Not a resident of the county	15
I'm late	13
Not a citizen	9
Former felon	3

100 Centre: Disqualifications	Count
Doesn't speak English	6
I'm late	3
Former felon	1
Not a resident of the county	1

111 Centre: Disqualifications	Count
Doesn't speak English	15
I'm late	7
Former felon	1
Not a resident of the county	1

360 Adams: Disqualifications	Count
Doesn't speak English	31
Not a citizen	15
I'm late	4
Former felon	3
Not a resident of the county	3