



Citizens Jury Project Report August 2010

Summary

In August of 2010, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in seven (7) 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 August, 286 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 293 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 six (6) CJP sites in August 2010.² At one (1) site, the greatest number of questions concerned postponements and difficulties with jury service.

Recommendations from jurors, or otherwise suggested by juror comments, this month include:

- **Recognition of personnel:** Recognition of courtroom personnel at 60 Centre Street for their excellent work with jurors.
- **Computers:** Time limits for computer usage should be implemented at locations where such limits do not already exist, and there should be enforcement of time limits where jurors appear to be abusing the privilege.
- **Televisions:** Jurors have expressed an interest in having different channels shown on the different TVs in the courtroom. Jurors have also asked for an area in assembly rooms where they can sit without any sounds from the TVs being heard. Such variety should be made available in courtroom facilities where it is feasible.
- **Payphones:** Informing jurors, perhaps at the time summonses are being sent, that the Bronx courthouse does not have payphones might reduce the frustration of some jurors.
- **Grand Jury service:** Separate entrances and exits from the courtroom for witnesses and jurors, or procedures to ensure that witnesses and jurors do not come into contact with each other.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During August, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 35 jurors 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 (16). Six (6) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Two (2) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and another two (2) about using the computers. One (1) juror said *“The staff was very courteous and respectful and I commend the work that everyone is doing. However, either more computers should be brought, or there should be a time limit for computer use (one hour, for example).”* One (1) other juror asked about having a private area to use a breast pump.

100 Centre Street: During August, 37 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 39 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (16). Twelve (12) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. One (1) juror commented that *“I’ve been called (summoned to serve) about 12 times, and never served in a trial. Now I was called again and I’m too old for this!”*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During August, 24 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 25 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (22). Three (3) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During August, only 5 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 5 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (2). In addition to the abbreviated CJP August schedule and the lower number of jurors serving this month, an intern who had been assigned to work at this location three times in August was unavailable to work due to personal reasons.

360 Adams Street: During August, 30 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 32 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (22). Eight (8) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During August, 102 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 106 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving (33). Thirty-one (31) questions were in regard to the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Fourteen (14) questions were asked regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and another fourteen (14) were related to qualifications to serve. One (1) juror complained that *“There should be better shows on TV if we're going to be stuck in a room all day.”* One (1) juror said that s/he needed a payphone. One (1) juror shared that *“I enjoyed jury duty!”*

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During August, 47 jurors approached interns 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 (38). Seven (7) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Virtual Ombudservice/Grand Jury

In August, the following comment was received (amongst others) via the virtual ombudservice.

In trial juries, witnesses and jurors exit separately from the courtroom. During a case in which our grand jury voted for an indictment on the defendants, the prosecution witnesses who were ready to exit (in this case, the victims), were lined up in the same hallway in which the grand jurors used to exit the chambers and building. It was the last case of the day, and as we exited, one of the witnesses was heard saying, "Put them in jail!" to our group of jurors-an unnecessary encounter which could have been avoided if we exited separately.

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.

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?"