



## Citizens Jury Project Report June 2010

### Summary

In June of 2010, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in nine (9) courthouse locations in New York City for six to twelve hours per week.<sup>1</sup> The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In June, 645 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 670 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 June 2010.<sup>2</sup> At two (2) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure,<sup>3</sup> and at one (1), the largest number came from jurors who arrived late.

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

- **Privacy concerns:** that court personnel be made aware of their privacy concerns, in particular about Social Security numbers, and that jurors be told how their information is being kept confidential;
- **Court personnel:** that Larry Litvin at 100 Centre Street be recognized for his excellent work;
- **Examination of restrooms:** that the condition of the restrooms be checked at 100 and 111 Centre Street, and that any necessary maintenance be undertaken;
- **Seating:** that more seating be made available at 360 Adams during peak times;
- **Parking lot safety:** that the Concourse Plaza Parking on 200 E 161st St in the Bronx should be examined from the standpoint of safety; and,
- **Time management:** that time be managed more efficiently at the Special Narcotics Grand Jury at 80 Centre St. in Manhattan.

## New York County

**60 Centre Street:** During June, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 102 jurors with 107 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (60). Seventeen (17) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Thirteen (13) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Six (6) jurors raised questions concerning qualifications to serve.

**100 Centre Street:** During June, 95 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 100 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (67). Nine (9) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) late jurors approached interns, and four (4) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Three (3) jurors raised questions concerning qualifications to serve. One (1) juror expressed concerns about privacy, saying *“I do not feel comfortable with putting my Social Security number on the summons. Someone stole my information before.”* Another juror had an appreciate comment for court personnel: *“He (Larry Litvin) deserves a raise. He's the best!”* One (1) juror complained about the facilities:

Physical conditions of the restrooms in this building are an insult to the citizens since all come with the best intentions to serve the state and we all pay taxes. All restrooms need maintenance. Same comment for 111 Centre Street. The waiting area in that building has broken concrete and pigeon feces is visible.

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** During June, 60 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 62 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). Sixteen (16) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Ten (10) late jurors approached interns. Seven (7) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Three (3) jurors raised questions concerning qualifications to serve. Two (2) questions were asked about computers.

**111 Centre Street, 11<sup>th</sup> floor:** During June, 10 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 10 questions and comments. Late jurors asked four (4) questions, and three (3) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. One (1) juror said *“I would voluntarily do jury duty every chance I got if it were possible. Especially since I'm retired.”*

## Kings County

**320 Jay Street:** During June, 58 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 59 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (31). Nine (9) late jurors approached interns, and eight (8) questions were asked in regard to the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Five (5) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. Two (2) questions concerned qualifications to serve.

**360 Adams Street:** During June, 56 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 58 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (27). Sixteen (16) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Three (3) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. Two (2) jurors made complaints, one saying that *“There are not enough seats in jury assembly room; there were almost twenty people standing.”*, and the other that *“It’s time consuming to stay a long period of time after not being picked for a case and dismissed.”* A more appreciative juror said *“I love jury duty. I sit here, I’m on my computer all day and get paid for it.”*

### **Bronx County**

**215 East 161st Street:** During June, 173 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 180 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (67). Forty-nine (49) questions were asked regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Twenty-eight (28) questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving. Seven (7) late jurors approached interns. Five (5) questions were related to qualifications to serve.

Two (2) jurors commented on the pay received for serving: *“Compensation should be minimum wage”*, and *“They should pay our salary or at least partial salary.”* Two (2) other jurors shared opinions on parking: *“Parking (Concourse Plaza Parking on 200 E 161st St) is very dangerous; there is no lighting, there is barely any security and it is very isolated”*, and *“There should be a juror’s parking spot. Parking is hard to find and the discount provided for the parking lot is not enough.”* Two (2) more jurors referred to security and entering the building: *“The lines are too long.”*, and *“The trays (used to place personal items, keys, etc. when going through security) are filthy.”*

One (1) juror said that better directions should be given to the jurors; the juror stated that after entering the courthouse, he was told by a clerk to go upstairs, and when he got there, he was told he was not supposed to be there. One (1) juror asked where he could make a phone call, and was disappointed in not finding payphones.

An appreciative juror said:

I’m in attendance as a juror at the Hall of Justice at 265, 161<sup>st</sup> Street in the Bronx, and I have to say, the experience is HUGE improvement over my first few times serving jury duty. I like the modern facilities and the fact that there are enough seats for everyone. The fact that there are the restroom and a lounge (with vending machines) in the juror assembly area is spot on! Good job! I would like to suggest, though, that there be either internet terminals made available in the reading room, or at least wi-fi service for those of us with laptops. Thanks for making the juror experience more pleasing.<sup>4</sup>

### **Queens County**

**Kew Gardens:** During June, 50 jurors approached interns with 53 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (36). Six (6) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Jurors offered the following four (4) suggestions: *“You guys should get a change and coffee machine.”*; *“They should put speakers in the restrooms.”*; and *“There should be a parking for the jurors.”* Three (3) questions were asked about postponements and difficulty in serving.

## Nassau County

**Mineola:** During February, 33 jurors approached interns with 35 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (15). Nine (9) questions were asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Two (2) questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving. One (1) juror, concerned about privacy, said “*I’m uncomfortable putting my Social Security number on the summons.*” One (1) juror wondered “*Why do I need to be here at 8:30am when names aren’t called until 10am?*” One (1) appreciative juror commented that “*This process is much better than it used to be.*”

### Virtual Ombudservice

In June, the following comments were received (amongst others) via the virtual ombudservice.

Hi. Today I just finished a two week assignment to the Special Narcotics Grand Jury at 80 Centre St. in Manhattan. I found it to be a great learning experience. However, I have a couple suggestions/concerns. Time management with the jury was poor. Report time was 10 AM but often times we didn't even have a quorum (16 jurors) till 10:30 AM. People just walked in as they chose. The same went for breaks. If we were given 15 minutes, people would still be trickling in 30 minutes later. This seems unfair to jurors who are timely like me. There should be some penalty for disrespecting court time. There were several instances where the ADA and her witnesses were staged and ready to go, but they had to wait on jurors. One last thing. It seems that the court was a little disorganized and poor at communicating things that are happening to the jurors. I know we have to wait around and be available during the day as cases come in, but it would be nice to know a little more thoroughly what's going on. Thank you for your time and for this great experience.

Jurors were given a yellow card and had to report to another courthouse. When they entered the other courthouse, they did not have to go through security. This is something to be concerned about because any stranger could walk in with a yellow card or a juror could grab a weapon and take it to the other courthouse. [The location was only identified as “Manhattan criminal court.”]

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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 p.m. 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> OCA has informed us that “Internet service is on the way.”