



Citizens Jury Project Report September 2010

Summary

In September 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.¹ The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In September, 465 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 512 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 September 2010.² At three (3) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³

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

- **Recognition of personnel:** Recognition of courtroom clerk Marlene Gutterman at 111 Centre Street, 11th floor, for her excellent work with jurors.
- **Electrical outlets (location of):** Recently, CJP suggested the installation of outlets for juror convenience. In this report, we advocate the simpler step of informing jurors where well-situated outlets are located, as part of juror orientation.
- **Soap dispensers:** With flu season approaching, CJP renews its recommendation made last year at this time for all courts to take the inexpensive and effective step of purchasing and placing liquid soap dispensers in high traffic areas.
- **Summonses:** Manhattan jurors should be notified via the summons that they should expect to serve for a minimum of 2 days.
- **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.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During September, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 28 jurors with 29 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (10). Nine (9) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Four (4) late jurors approached interns, and three (3) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One (1) juror said that she had been exempt as a care giver for the last ten years and the system is “*totally different from the last time*” she was here. She said that jury service is “*almost pleasurable now.*”

100 Centre Street: During September, 70 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 75 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (42). Nine (9) 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.

Juror suggestions and appreciative comments included:

- I think jury duty is a great service and a privilege that everyone should take part in once in their lives;
- This should be run like a business: start at 8:00am and have the jury picked and give them 1/2 hour for lunch, that's it. However, it's much better right now because a few years ago jurors had to wait for at least 5 days, hanging around in the jury pool;
- I did not know we had to serve for a minimum of 2 days. This should be stated on the ballot or jurors should be notified prior to the day they serve; and,
- I was in the bathroom, yesterday, and this was before 5:00pm and the jury assembly room was locked. I was unable to unlock the door and walk out. Someone should make sure no one is inside the jury assembly room or the bathroom before locking it.

One (1) juror complained that, “*I've been called (summoned to serve) about 12 times, and never served on a trial. Now I was called again and I'm too old for this!*”

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During September, 74 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 76 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (34). Thirteen (13) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Ten (10) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving, and ten (10) late jurors approached interns with questions. One (1) juror shared his opinion that “*War Veterans should not have to serve jury duty.*”

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During September, 17 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 19 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (6). Five (5) jurors inquired about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Three (3) late jurors approached interns.

Jurors offered two (2) suggestions: *“The typing on the back of the summons is really small and the map is confusing. Maybe they could make it more readable”* and, *“I think if this was titled jury service instead of jury duty more people would simply do it.”* One (1) juror expressed her appreciation for court clerk Marlene Gutterman as follows: *“I was in the jury assembly room 1121 at 111 Centre Street. The lady in charge made the process more congenial and humane. She is skilled, talented, and dedicated. I do not know her name. I was very impressed by the way she does this operation here.”*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During September, 36 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 37 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (19). Ten (10) jurors asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Four (4) late jurors approached interns.

360 Adams Street: During September, 59 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 62 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (34). Fifteen (15) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) questions were asked concerning the computers. One (1) juror commented *“[The clerk] needs to speak slower and clearer. Is there a way they can post the name of those called on the TV screen?”* Court personnel have addressed the issue of the clerk speaking more slowly and clearly; on the question of displaying names on the TV screens, CJP was informed that while names are not posted, juror numbers sometimes are, to reach jurors who have not responded to their names being called – a practice that clerks find effective.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During September, 74 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 76 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (28). Nineteen (19) questions were asked about postponements and difficulty in serving, and nine (9) questions were asked regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Five (5) questions were related to qualifications to serve, and four (4) late jurors approached interns. Four jurors complained that the assembly room was too cold. One (1) juror said that *“[The] summons says to not bring cell phones because there are plenty of payphones and there are none; you can put me down as being very upset.”* One (1) juror shared that *“This is my third time here and I like jury duty; I don't like the wait but it's a good experience”*

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During September, 99 jurors approached interns with 104 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (64). Twenty (20) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Nine (9) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving, and five (5) were raised about the computers. Other juror comments included: *“This room is not big enough for all the jurors”*; *“Three of the computers are not working. The firewall search engine was down”*; *“I would like it if they would serve /have coffee, bagels, and muffins/donuts”*; and, *“Are there any outlets that I can use to plug in my laptop?”*

Nassau County

Mineola: During September, a newly hired intern worked in Mineola for one (1) day. 5 jurors approached her with 5 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (3). Two (2) jurors asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Virtual Ombudservice Comment Concerning Grand Jury

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

I am now in my fourth week of Grand Jury service. Four weeks is such a tremendous burden. I don't know who thinks it is okay to take 21 consecutive mornings away from a citizen without regard to the citizen's other commitments. At least in regular jury, you can explain why sitting on a long trial is a problem.

To add insult to injury, the WiFi keeps going in and out today.

By the way, it is no comfort that I will not be called for 8 years, as it is most likely that I will still be alive at the time.

Juror Comment Regarding CJP

Thank you for being so helpful and listening to our needs and concerns.

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?”

³ 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?”