



**Citizens Jury Project Report
June 2007
Summary**

In June 2007ⁱ, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice Booths in eight courthouse locations in New York City,ⁱⁱ in order to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. During this period, 392 jurors approached CJP with 444 questions or comments. The booths were staffed by trained interns from six to twelve morning hours per week.

This report identifies common questions and comments raised to CJP at each site along with suggestions for improvement, where appropriate, and a set of general recommendations.

Inquiries about the location of facilities and amenities (restrooms, food and beverages, etc.) or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse were the most common juror questions at six (6) CJP sites in June 2007. At a seventh courthouse, 320 Jay Street, there were many appreciative comments, complimentary to court personnel and also complimenting facilities. At the eighth courthouse, in Jamaica, the most frequently asked questions were about using the computers and internet access.

General Recommendations:

1. **Updated Signage or Guides:** Modern state-of-the-art signage using visually-familiar icons would benefit many jurors. Signage should be located in frequently-trafficked areas.
2. **Additional language assistance:** (a) Counties should consider automated multilingual juror help lines, using state-of-the-art multilingual mailbox messaging. (b) On its homepage, nyjuror.gov should include multiple-language links, describing qualifications and legitimate reasons for postponements and excusals. (c) Jury summons should add abbreviated multilingual notices of Internet or phone information. We understand that OCA is in the process of developing handouts in multiple languages explaining the basic qualifications for jury services.

3. **Temperature in jury assembly rooms:** In some courthouses, some jurors report that the temperature is uncomfortable. Due to the construction of some courthouses, the best efforts to alleviate the problem may only have limited success. CJP suggests that jurors being asked to serve at such courthouses be informed, possibly on the nyjuror website, that juror assembly rooms may be uncomfortably cold during the summer months, and therefore to dress appropriately. We thank one of the jurors for this suggestion.
4. **Inform jurors in advance about wireless access:** As a result of the vast improvement by the courts in shortening the average time of jury service, many jurors now serve for only one day. As a result, many such jurors cannot take advantage of wireless computer access, because they only learn of it when they arrive to serve. Providing this information beforehand—on the nyjuror website, and/or in the initial juror questionnaire—would allow these jurors to work or entertain themselves while waiting, and thereby help address one of the most common juror complaints—that of boredom and wasted/unproductive time. CJP is grateful to Chief Clerk Vincent Homenick for offering this suggestion (which we believe he is trying to implement in Manhattan). A serving juror also made this recommendation.

New York County

60 Centre Street: In June of 2007, the CJP Ombudservice Booth interacted with 74 jurors who approached with 78 questions and comments.¹ The most common questions (30) concerned the location of facilities and amenities, or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. Fifteen (15) questions and comments had to do with courthouse procedures and what jurors were required to do, such as: What to do with the summons (asked by several jurors). *See General Recommendations 1 and 3.*

100 Centre Street: In June of 2007, 92 jurors approached the Ombudservice Booth with 104 questions and comments.² The most frequent questions (50) concerned the location of facilities and amenities, or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. There were eleven (11) complaints: five (5) concerned courthouse facilities (No speaker system in the hallway. Not enough seats.). There were four (4) appreciative comments, including, ‘Jury duty is a great thing!’ and ‘I think Larry (the Clerk) is great. He brings a great energy. He seems happy doing his work. He is very professional when he is speaking. The directions he gives are very clear. He keeps jurors focused.’ *See General Recommendation 1.*

¹ In June of 2007, 1,553 jurors reported for service at 60 Centre Street.

² In June of 2007, 2,131 jurors reported for service at 100 Centre Street.

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: In June of 2007, the Ombudservice Booth took information from 57 jurors who approached with 65 questions and comments,³ the largest category of which concerned the location of facilities and amenities, or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse (18), followed by twelve (12) complaints: five (5) concerning courthouse facilities (Jury room is very crowded. Not enough seats. Temperature too cold.); two (2) concerning the amount jurors are paid; and five (5) ‘miscellaneous’ complaints. There were also three (3) appreciative comments from jurors; one said, ‘Judge Hayes was very good, also clerk yesterday (didn't remember name) was very clear.’ *See General Recommendations 1 and 3.*

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: In June of 2007, the CJP Ombudservice addressed comments from 35 jurors, who approached with 42 questions and comments.⁴ The most frequently asked questions (14) were questions about the location of facilities and amenities, or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. Next, there were ten (10) complaints; eight (8) concerning the facilities (jury room too cold/freezing, not enough seats, TVs not working or not on). Another juror had appreciative comments: ‘The jury room and the clerk are better now than in 2002. The clerk has a sense of humor.’ Jurors made five (5) suggestions.ⁱⁱⁱ *See General Recommendations 1 and 3.*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: In June of 2007, the CJP Booth staff was approached by 55 jurors who raised 69 questions and comments. There were eighteen (18) complaints. Three (3) complaints concerned courthouse facilities; three (3) court personnel; three (3) having to do with the amount jurors are paid; and nine (9) were ‘miscellaneous’ complaints. Of the latter nine, three (3) were in regard to the practice of calling up felons apart from other jurors, to determine a potential juror’s qualifications to serve.^{iv} Fourteen (14) questions and comments had to do with courthouse procedures and what jurors were required to do, such as, ‘Where do I sign out?’; ‘How long is jury service?’; ‘What time is lunch?’. Importantly, jurors also made nine (9) appreciative comments, four (4) of them complimentary to the clerks. CJP would like to call attention to the scarcity of questions concerning the location of facilities and amenities at 320 Jay Street. There were five (5); in May, eleven (11). These figures suggest that signage is effective, considering that 4,394 jurors passed through the assembly room at 320 Jay street in June. Assistant Deputy Chief Clerk Loretta Argiro and I spoke about felons being called separately. The customary practice followed in Kings County is to call all jurors with issues as a group and screen each juror privately in a separate room. CJP is satisfied that this issue has been addressed.

Bronx County

In June of 2007, 60 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice Booth with 66 questions and comments.⁵ The most common questions (26) concerned the location of facilities and amenities,

³ In June of 2007, 2,067 jurors reported for service at 111 Centre Street, 3rd Fl.

⁴ In June of 2007, 1,590 jurors reported for service at 111 Centre Street, 11th Fl.

⁵ In June of 2007, 4,265 jurors reported for service in the Bronx.

or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. There were twelve (12) questions regarding courthouse procedures and what jurors were required to do, including: juror forgot summons; ‘Do I have to sit through orientation if I want a postponement?’; ‘I think I've served too recently’; ‘What do I do with this [non-compliance] letter?’; and, ‘I forgot what my social security number is, to fill out the form. What do I do?’ See *General Recommendations 1 and 2*.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: In June of 2007, CJP staff recorded 11 questions and comments from 11 jurors who approached the booth.⁶ Three (3) questions were asked regarding the location of facilities and amenities, or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. Three (3) questions concerned postponements and difficulties with jury service.

Jamaica: In June of 2007, the Ombuds staff talked with 8 jurors who approached with 9 questions and comments.⁷ The most frequent questions (4) had to do with using computers and whether there is internet access. CJP believes that the low number of juror comments and questions is due to two factors: 1) the CJP booth has been relocated to the back of the jury room, out of sight for most jurors; and 2) clerks have not been announcing that the intern is there, and available to take questions, comments, complaints and suggestions.^v

ⁱ Booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week; the Bronx booth is operated two days per week.

ⁱⁱ Booths are in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The booths in New York County (60 Centre Street, 100 Centre Street and 111 Centre Street (3rd & 11th Floors)) are generally staffed on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The booth in Bronx County is generally staffed on Mondays and Wednesdays. The booths in Kings (320 Jay Street) and Queens (Kew Gardens and Jamaica) County are generally staffed on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

ⁱⁱⁱ The suggestions included: tell people to bring sweaters; tell people in advance about the court's wireless access; have a vendor sell coffee inside the building; make (more) announcements as to what's going on and when we should expect to hear our names called.

^{iv} The comments made to interns were:

I wish they wouldn't call us, felons, in front of everyone. I served my time and don't want to be forced to approach the clerk in front of everyone and be known to everyone as a felon.

I feel bad for all those people who were convicted of felony at some point in their lives, and who have to be called on in front of numerous people. They should combine this category with several others to make people more comfortable.

It is embarrassing that I, a former felon convict, should be forced to be called upon in front of hundreds of people. It is entirely unprofessional and should not be condoned.

^v After several discussions with court personnel, the last taking place in early August, CJP has been told that announcements will be made whenever an intern is at the booth in Sutphin. CJP hopes this step will make interns more accessible to jurors than they have been in recent months.

⁶ In June of 2007, 1,988 jurors reported for service in Kew Gardens.

⁷ In June of 2007, 2,690 jurors reported for service in Jamaica.