



Citizens Jury Project Report November 2008

Summary

In November of 2008, 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 November, 290 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 301 questions or comments. The low number of jurors approaching, especially in contrast with the number reported in October, is attributable to the November holidays, and to three CJP interns having ended their internships.²

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to CJP at each site. It also includes one general recommendation.

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 November of 2008.³ At the remaining three (3) sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. Because these questions do not vary greatly from location to location, or from month to month, CJP will not set out examples by courthouse in this report.⁴

General Recommendation

Healthy-food alternatives: A juror suggested that, “There should be [a better] variety of snacks besides junk food.” Interns have confirmed that, at some courthouses, selections of food to purchase are limited. CJP encourages that (more) healthy food alternatives be made available to jurors waiting to serve.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During November, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 42 jurors with 43 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (27). Six (6) concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were three juror suggestions.

100 Centre Street: During November, 41 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 43 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (24). Five (5) juror questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Interns also recorded two (2) appreciative comments.⁵

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During November, 19 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 19 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (9). Three (3) questions concerned qualifications to serve.

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During November, 16 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 17 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (7). Five (5) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During November, 39 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 41 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (22). Eight (8) of the jurors asking these questions arrived late. Seven (7) questions involved the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

360 Adams Street: During November, 32 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 35 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (20). Thirteen (13) of those jurors arrived late. Five (5) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During November, 21 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 21 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (13). Four (4) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During November, 36 jurors approached interns with 37 questions. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (18). Six (6) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Jurors made four (4) suggestions.⁶ One juror offered an appreciative comment.⁷

Westchester

111 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd: During November, 40 jurors approached interns with 42 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (28). Ten (10) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

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 pm. Additionally, interns occasionally report that jurors have been discharged early, meaning, of course, that there is no one left to approach them.

² In November, Election Day, Veteran's Day, and in particular the Thanksgiving holiday impacted on the number of jurors whom interns could interact with. CJP was also operating with eight interns, rather than the eleven it often has on staff.

³ 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?"

⁴ 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?"

⁵ Appreciative comments included, "Jury duty is a lot better than it used to be."

⁶ One suggestion – and related complaint – follows: "I hate waiting around with nothing to do in one big large crowded outdated room. How about sending me a text message telling me where or when I should go. Giving classes instead of having the idiot box (TV) on all day long. Classes such as improving your English, Spanish, writing skills, filing taxes; anything besides having to sit here."

⁷ The juror said, "I am extremely satisfied with the food and drinks." Note: It was Juror Appreciation Day in Kew Gardens.