



Citizens Jury Project Report August 2009

Summary

In August of 2009, 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, 343 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 362 questions or comments.²

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 four (4) CJP sites in August 2009. At three (3) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³

General Recommendation: The Manhattan summons should state the two-day minimum requirement to serve.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During August, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 19 jurors with 20 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (12). Three (3) questions had to do with postponement or difficulty with jury service.

100 Centre Street: During August, 103 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 110 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (68). There were eight (8) appreciative comments, including,

- Jury duty is a necessity. Glad that they changed restrictions. Very nice facilities. Treated much better than before.

- Larry was great, very impressive, clear, kind, smart, calm. This part of the process was impressive like the lounge. Roberta was nice and kind, . . . I liked the person who changed my schedule. It is much better than the last time I did jury duty.
- Very competent, clear and efficient jury clerk today.

Seven (7) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) late jurors approached interns, and four (4) questions had to do with postponement or difficulty with jury service. One complaint was that, *“I don't think its right that people over seventy have to serve. I am seventy-two and I have a seventy-five year old husband that's sick and I need to take care of him.”* A suggestion was given that, *“It would have been helpful to know [from] the summons that we have to stay two days. It didn't say it and I didn't know I needed to take off yesterday and today.”*

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During August, 81 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 85 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (26). Twenty-five (25) questions were about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Twelve (12) late jurors approached interns. Five (5) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. There were four (4) suggestions, including that: *“You should have exercise and a yoga class here,”*; and, from a freelance writer, that, *“They should only consider people who are staff employees. I have to work at night as well as serve in the day and it's not fair.”* A juror said, *“I don't think it is right that you should be forced to serve jury duty.”* Another juror offered the appreciative comment that, *“The clerk is nice and funny.”*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During August, 92 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 95 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (56). Thirteen (13) questions were about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Eight (8) questions came from jurors who arrived late. A juror complained about prior service that, *“I never got paid for jury duty,”* and asked, *“Who do I speak to about it?”* Another juror said, *“. . . you shouldn't be able to serve jury duty unless you have a college education.”*

360 Adams Street: During August, 29 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 32 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (11). Seven (7) questions were asked about to the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. A juror offered that, *“The changes are excellent compared to ten years ago; the staff members [are very pleasant]. I believe jury service should have volunteers.”*

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During August, 14 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 14 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular

places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (10). There were four (4) questions concerning postponements or difficulty in serving.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During August, 6 jurors approached interns with 6 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (5).

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 CJP received almost eight hundred (800) fewer comments during August, as opposed to July. CJP believes the main causes for this difference are:

- a) In August, numerous courthouses did not call jurors during the second half of the month; and,
- b) On numerous occasions during the first half of August, relatively few jurors were called, and jurors were dismissed early in the day. There were other times when jurors were not called at all during this part of August.

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?"

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?"