



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission on the Jury, in its Interim Report released this summer, produced a number of constructive recommendations to improve the jury system, including the recommendation that uniform orientation scripts be prepared and summoning forms be revised to make certain that jurors are adequately informed about what is expected of them and what they can expect from jury duty.

To further that goal, this past fall, in addition to staffing the ombudservice booths, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) assisted the Office of Court Administration (OCA) in a number of projects. The CJP interns observed morning orientations and helped to analyze juror summonses statewide, in order to assist OCA in its efforts to standardize and improve the

information given to jurors during the orientation and on the summoning forms. Additionally, the interns conducted citywide reviews of jury facilities, evaluating the condition of the rooms and amenities, and noting what signs were posted for jurors.

The first part of the report outlines recent CJP activities, and includes a summary of the data from the past six months. The top three concerns of jurors citywide account for over half of the comments CJP received, and were from jurors who had a question about a court policy or procedure (35%), a question about where juror amenities (bathrooms, coffee, food, etc.) are located (10%), and a concern that they would be unable to serve and would like to postpone their service (7%).

Following the citywide summary, this report includes a comparison of the top concerns of jurors at the six different courthouses in which CJP operates booths, and incorporates some of CJP's observations from the morning orientation and facility reviews. The purpose of this comparison is to examine the differences among courts and to look at how those differences might affect jurors based on the CJP data.

The second section of the report provides a detailed analysis of data by individual courthouse, starting with 89-17 Sutphin Boulevard in Queens, where CJP recently expanded, followed by the other courthouses where CJP has an ongoing presence: 60 Centre, 100

Centre, 111 Centre, 3rd & 11th Floors, in Manhattan, and 360 Adams Street in Brooklyn.

Following the section analyzing data by individual courthouse are CJP's general recommendations based on the past six months of juror comments.

CJP Recommendations:

➤ **Provide more procedural information to jurors in the assembly room and throughout the process.** Jurors should be informed about their rights and have a clear understanding of the process of serving. Jurors should know what is expected of them on a daily basis, and what to do if they believe that they have a circumstance which might prevent them from being able to serve at that time. This recommendation is based on the large percentage of jurors who approached the CJP booth confused as to court policies and procedures for jury service.

➤ **Provide jurors with clear signs to direct jurors to available amenities and giving them basic instructions.** Lessening juror confusion and stress can allow jurors to focus on the proceedings and will promote comprehension. Even when information is included in orientations, clear signage is helpful for jurors who didn't listen, hear or understand oral instructions.

➤ **Investigate and devise ways to best accommodate non-English speakers.** Part of the work in accommodating these individuals is systemic, yet it must also be addressed at a court and community-specific level. Court officials and individuals have a day-to-day and historical perspective on the populations and communities that visit each court, and how staff and their facilities can be accommodating. Given the fact that Brooklyn and Queens have such large non-English speaking populations, but also have different approaches to handling these jurors, the pros and cons of each approach could be studied to determine what elements of their processes are the most efficient and also most respectful of jurors. CJP would be happy to assist in this project.

CONCLUSION

Jury reform has improved the administration of justice in New York, and jurors' perception of and performance within the jury system. In order to continue to improve the system, the Citizens Jury Project encourages the Unified Court System to implement the preceding recommendations. It is our hope that this and other CJP reports provide a framework for future reform.