



Citizens Jury Project Report October 2009

Summary

In October of 2009, 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 October, 846 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 881 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 October 2009.² At three (3) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³

New York County

60 Centre Street: During October, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 60 jurors with 61 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (32). Seventeen (17) late jurors approached interns. Seven (7) questions had to do with postponement or difficulty with jury service.

100 Centre Street: During October, 77 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 81 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (46). Eleven (11) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Seven (7) questions had to do with postponement or difficulty with jury service, and five (5) late jurors approached interns. A juror offered this appreciative comment: *“I find jury duty to be a lot better than it used to be. It's great they have limited it down to two days and they really seem to be trying to get us out of here as quickly as possible!”*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During October, 98 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 104 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (55). Thirteen (13) questions had to do with postponement or difficulty with jury service. Eleven (11) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and there were another eleven (11) questions unrelated to jury service. A juror commented that s/he had a headache when sitting in the assembly room, and believed that the cause was related to the air conditioner: *“How often do they change the air conditioner [filter]?”* Another said, *“It’s too stuffy in there. Unacceptable.”* A third juror complained, *“There aren’t any outlets in the hallway. There should be outlets out here.”*

Juror suggestions included:

- Make a phone call the night before to inform people if they have to come in and what time they have to be there. Queens does that. Queens is better;
- Its hot. Need a fan; and,
- They should really push to have hot coffee in here by winter. I don't feel like going back out in the cold.

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During October, 94 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 101 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (60). Eleven (11) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Nine (9) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving.

Juror suggestions included:

- Open up the jury pool to disabled or retired, even if they have served recently, so that you can have more people who want to be here for jury duty;
- [Have a] jury call-in system similar to suburbs of New York where you can continuously call-in to check if you are needed as a juror that day. As in, can wait at your office desk and call-in, and only report to duty if a case is called;
- Have a microwave oven for jurors to use; and,
- Have a garbage can in the lunch room.

Appreciative comments included:

- Thank you so much for a wonderful jury duty experience. I have served on jury duty since 1982, and this will make it my 6th time serving. Thank you for having computers; clean bathrooms WITH toilet paper; clear explanations from pleasant employees; and a nice video introduction for those jurors who have never served before. Thank you, thank you, thank you, for finally making jury duty a nice experience, instead of a complicated, uncommunicative, mystery. :) [comment sent as is to virtual ombudservice]
- I am honored to have completed my obligation as a prospective juror. I wish more people realized how important it is. It is one of the pillars of our democracy.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During October, 95 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 98 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (54). Thirteen (13) questions were about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Twelve (12) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. Four (4) questions were in regard to qualifications to serve. One (1) juror said, *“I was summoned to serve a few months back and I couldn’t serve because I’m a student and I teach. I told them I was free all summer when I filled out the paper and now 7 months later, I have to serve again while I have school and I have to teach.”*

360 Adams Street: During October, 75 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 83 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (37). Seventeen (17) questions were asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Seven (7) late jurors approached interns.

Juror complaints included:

- . . . Why don't they do something about the TV's? No one can hear anything, let alone read the captions. The chairs hurt my back and I'm here all day. . . . Why not put speakers in the lobby or by the steps so we could hear our names [called]? We should be reimbursed for our train and bus fare. . . . New York State is the highest paid for jury duty but it's also the highest in taxes and transportation.
- “What am I going to do between now and 2:15?” (The juror thought that a lunch break from 12:36 to 2:15 was too long.)

Appreciative comments included:

- You guys are much more efficient than Manhattan.
- [I] like the idea of an eight (8) year gap. (Presumably meaning the disqualification period before being called to serve again)

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During October, 190 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 195 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (83). Sixty-three (63) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were five (5) questions about qualifications to serve. A juror suggested that, *“They should have a cafeteria or food court.”* Another juror complained, *“We had to wait on line in the rain for fifteen (15) minutes at 9am. This is horrible.”*

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During October, 45 jurors approached interns with 47 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (16). Fourteen (14) questions were asked about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Juror complaints included:

- Stop calling old people. The current limit is 75....they should make it 70 years old.
- Is there any way to tighten the gap between lunch and when a panel is called? Yesterday before lunch, they knew who they wanted to pick for a case but didn't call us until after 3:00. If they know there will always be delays, they should announce it.

Another juror had an issue with the fact that there are no longer exemptions (doctors, the self-employed, etc.). The juror said that \$40.00 doesn't come close to what a self-employed person makes in a day, and that the system should not require that they serve. A juror suggested that, "*There should be more outlets than the ones under the computer.*" Another juror appreciated that, "*Queens has a bookshelf of Romance books. Great!*"

Nassau County

Minneola: During October, 106 jurors approached interns with 111 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (55). Forty-one (41) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) questions were asked in regard to postponements and difficulty in serving. Suggestions included, "*I should be allowed to bring my knitting in.*"; "*They should have a sign pointing to where the information counter is. It's pretty hidden.*"; and, "*They should list the names on the TV screens, so if you're out, you know when you enter that your name was called.*" Jurors also said that, "*They need to do something about the wait time.*"; and, "*An hour and a half for lunch is obscene.*"

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. CJP began operating in Minneola this month.

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?"