



Citizens Jury Project Report October 2010

Summary

In October of 2010, 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, 969 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 1011 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 seven (7) CJP sites in October 2010.² At one (1) site, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³ At one (1) site, the largest number of questions were in regard to postponements or difficulty in serving.

Recommendations from jurors, or otherwise suggested by juror comments, this month include:

- **Microwaves and refrigerators:** Consideration should be given to purchasing relatively inexpensive appliances that can serve the needs of many jurors.
- **Soap dispensers:** With flu season approaching, CJP renews its recommendation made last year at this time to take the effective and inexpensive step of purchasing and placing soap dispensers in high traffic areas.
- **Asking about race and ethnicity:** Explanations should be developed and given as to why jurors are being asked to answer questions about race and ethnicity when they come to serve.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During October, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 123 jurors with 130 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (70). Twenty-five (25) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving, and twenty-five (25) in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

100 Centre Street: During October, 40 jurors approached interns with 47 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (22). Eight (8) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) questions were asked about postponements and difficulty in serving. One juror suggested *“The television should be turned off or there should be another one since not everyone needs to hear Fox news. Better yet, save the electricity and turn it off.”* Another juror said:

Some of us have little money and are getting paid in FIVE weeks. We also have to spend the little money we have on food. Not every juror that comes here has money. We can't bring food from home because there are no microwaves or refrigerators. I would appreciate this if it's taken into consideration.

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During October, 39 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 41 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (15). Fourteen (14) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Five (5) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and four concerned qualifications to serve. One (1) juror suggested that *“Military veterans should not have to serve.”* One (1) juror complained *“I can make a lot more money doing other things right now. What a waste of time for \$40 a day.”* One (1) juror said *“Why do I have to serve two days? I was not prepared for this.”*

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During October, 103 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 108 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (62). Sixteen (16) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Thirteen (13) questions were asked about postponements and difficulty in serving. Four (4) jurors complained about not being able to get coffee inside the courthouse, adding that (in the words of one) *“It is annoying to leave and come back through security.”*

Other comments included:

I was pleasantly surprised at the facilities when I served earlier this week. Clean, fairly comfortable with TV, internet, etc. The jury clerks were very pleasant and professional. My judge was very aware of the time sitting around outside the courtroom. 15 minutes was never 15 minutes. I think that the judiciary should look at ways to speed up selection process.

(Referring to juror information card): Why do they always want to know my race? I hate that.

There aren't enough power outlets inside assembly room.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During October, 90 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 93 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (36). Twenty-four (24) questions were raised about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Fourteen (14) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Seven (7) questions were related to qualifications to serve. One (1) juror offered that:

Right now, there is no incentive to show up on time. It would make sense to scan the juror summons card as each person arrives and to reward people who arrive on time, or penalize people who are late. Scanning would also allow you to generate an attendance list from a computer.

360 Adams Street: During October, 72 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 76 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (36). Nineteen (19) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) questions were asked concerning the computers, and six (6) about postponements and difficulty in serving. Five (5) late jurors approached interns. One (1) juror complained “*The coffee machine is broken. It took my money.*”

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During October, 137 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 143 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving (38). Thirty-one (31) questions were in regard to the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Twenty-five (25) late jurors approached interns. Twenty-four (24) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Five (5) questions were related to qualifications to serve. Other juror comments included “*Questionnaires would be an efficient way to evaluate jury duty.*” and “*Jury duty is really good; it is our civil duty!*” Another juror was disappointed that the facility lacks a microwave oven.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During October, 186 jurors approached interns with 194 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (127). Twenty-seven (27) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Thirteen (13) questions were asked about using computers. Seven (7) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Other juror comments included:

Why does jury duty only pay less than a minimum wage? Minimum wage is \$7.75 an hour and I only get \$40 a day. It would have paid more to go to work at McDonalds today.

They always say how important we are to the justice system. Why not put on something more interesting and intelligent like the news (CNN or Good Day New York). I feel it is demeaning when we have to watch television shows like this.

Why can't we use our cell phones if we are allowed to bring in laptops and use the computers provided?

Nassau County

Mineola: During October, 179 jurors approached interns with 186 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (74). Sixty-two (62) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Twenty-six (26) late jurors approached interns. Eleven (11) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Four (4) questions concerned qualifications to serve. One (1) juror asked “*Do I need to move my car? I’m parked facing in, not out. Will I get a ticket?*” One juror said “*I work per diem. . . . My job does not pay for jury duty and \$40 a day is a joke.*”

Virtual Ombudservice/Grand Jury

In October, the following comment was received (amongst others) via the virtual ombudservice.

Grand Jury: Two (2) jurors reported similarly:

Too much time wasted; all we do is wait. They tell us to be here at 9:30 am and we don't get called until 11 am. We listen to an attorney for about 15 minutes. We are told to take a 15 minute break which then turns into an hour break. We then listen to two more people and are let out for lunch which sometimes is 3 hours.

CJP:

Thank you for being so helpful. (Comment made to an intern).

I'm done waiting, and now I am finished for 8 years. That got a round of applause. Thanks (CJP staff) for your prompt and kind (email) responses, and for doing the tireless work of improving the system.

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 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?”