



**Citizens Jury Project Report
April 2007
Summary**

In April 2007, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice Booths in eight courthouse locations in New York City,¹ in order to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. During this period, approximately 26,000 jurors reported for service, and 631 jurors approached CJP with questions or comments; 625 approached a booth, and 6 contacted CJP via the virtual ombudservice or phone line. The booths were staffed by trained interns from six to twelve hours per week, representing approximately 15 to 40 % of court hours.

This report identifies common questions and comments raised to CJP at each site along with suggestions for improvement, where appropriate, and a set of general recommendations.

Overall, inquiries about the location of facilities and amenities (restrooms, food and beverages, etc.) in the courthouse topped juror questions at six CJP sites in April 2007. At four of these posts, a significant number of jurors also sought to clarify if they were in the right place. In one courthouse, 320 Jay Street, the most common questions sought information about postponements or difficulties with service. At the Jamaica courthouse, jurors most frequently expressed their appreciation.

General Recommendations:

1. **Courthouse Maps:** Simple palm-card maps of facilities and public amenities of interest to jurors at each courthouse, as well as locations of jury assembly rooms, could assist many jurors. Maps could also provide information of where to go for postponements and excusals. Modern directional “site maps” should be posted at entrances, near elevators and in jury rooms.
2. **Updated Signage or Guides:** Modern state-of-the-art signage using visually-familiar icons would benefit many jurors. Signage should be located in frequently-trafficked areas.
3. **Additional language assistance:** (a) Counties should consider automated multilingual juror help lines, using state-of-the-art multilingual mailbox messaging. (b) On its homepage, nyjuror.gov should include multiple-language links, describing qualifications and legitimate reasons for postponements and excusals. (c) Jury summons should add abbreviated multilingual notices of Internet or phone information.

New York County

60 Centre Street: In April of 2007, more than 1550 jurors reported for service at 60 Centre Street. The CJP Ombudservice Booth interacted with 131 jurors who approached with 147 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse (47 inquiries). Jurors frequently inquired whether they were in the right place, the second largest category of comments (24 questions). **Recommendation:** Increase and modernize signage about the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse by the elevators, in the hallways and inside the jury room. *In addition, see General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report.*

100 Centre Street: In April of 2007, nearly 2000 jurors reported for service at 100 Centre Street. CJP encountered 152 jurors at the Ombudservice Booth with 172 questions and comments. The most frequent questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse or information about the location of jurors' assigned service (67 and 24 questions, respectively). **Recommendation:** Increase and update signage about the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse by the elevators, in the hallways and inside the jury room. *In addition, see General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report.*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: In April of 2007, nearly 2000 jurors reported for service at 111 Centre Street, 3rd floor. The Ombudservice Booth took information from 43 jurors who approached with 53 questions and comments, the largest category of which concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse, followed by questions about the location of the assigned service room (13 and 6 questions, respectively). **Recommendation:** Increase and modernize signage about the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse by the elevators, in the hallways and inside the jury room. *In addition, see General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report.*

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: In April of 2007, nearly 1650 jurors reported for service at 111 Centre Street, 11th floor. The CJP Ombudservice addressed comments from 32 jurors, who approached with 37 questions and comments. The most frequently asked questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse (8 questions).

Kings County

320 Jay Street: In April of 2007, nearly 3,750 jurors reported for service at 320 Jay Street. The CJP Booth staff interacted with 107 jurors who raised 122 questions and comments. The largest number of inquiries sought information about postponements or commented on difficulties with service (20 questions), citing a variety of issues, ranging from health matters to financial hardship or schooling demands. Other common questions were about the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse (14 questions). A third group inquired about qualifications for service (12 questions), with two-thirds expressing concerns about difficulties with the English language. **Recommendation:** Evaluate and determine increased communications opportunities on postponements and excusals, and review clarity of summons on the qualifications for service. *See General Recommendation 3. Monitor signage and directional needs; see General Recommendations 1 and 2.*

Bronx County

In April of 2007, over 3,500 jurors reported for service in the Bronx. The CJP Ombuds staff reported that 116 jurors approached with 125 questions and comments. The most frequent questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse (54 questions), while another area of concern arose from jurors who were uncertain if they had reached their assigned service room (16 questions). Questions about qualifications for service formed the third largest category of inquiry (11 questions, 4 on language issues, 4 on lack of citizenship).

Recommendation: Increase and modernize signage about the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse by the elevators, in the hallways and inside the jury room. *See General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report.* Upgrade multiple-language information about qualifications on summons and nyjuror.gov. *See General Recommendation 3.*

Queens County

Kew Gardens: In April of 2007, nearly 2,000 jurors reported for service in Kew Gardens. CJP staff recorded 22 questions and comments from 17 jurors who approached the booth. The most frequent questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse (8 questions), however, this is a significant drop from the prior month when four times such questions were raised, and the posting of new signage appears to have satisfactorily addressed many juror needs. (A decline in jurors approaching the Ombuds staff in general from the prior month is also attributable to an out-of-traffic location of the CJP Booth at the back of the room; disuse of attention-drawing televisions near the booth, and, at times, additional clerk presence at the desk.) **Recommendation:** Study signage. Other courthouses may find the signage at Kew Gardens to be a useful model.

Jamaica: In April of 2007, nearly 2,550 jurors reported for service in Jamaica. The Ombuds staff served 29 jurors who approached with 38 questions and comments. The most frequent comments were appreciative (7 comments, 2 complimentary of court officers, one appreciative of the judge's talk; one pleased with computer access). The most frequent question otherwise concerned the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse (7 questions).

Recommendations: Consider commendation to courthouse staff for positive service. Increase signage about the location of facilities and amenities within the courthouse by the elevators, in the hallways and inside the jury room. *In addition, see General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report.*

Virtual Ombudservice

Phone Line or Internet: In April of 2007, jurors left 6 comments for CJP, none indicating at which courthouse they had served. Juror complaints concerned wasted time (2) and low pay for service (2).

ⁱ Booths are in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The booths in New York County (60 Centre Street, 100 Centre Street and 111 Centre Street (3rd & 11th Floors)) are generally staffed on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The booth in Bronx County is generally staffed on Mondays and Wednesdays. The booths in Kings (320 Jay Street) and Queens (Kew Gardens and Jamaica) County are generally staffed on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.