



## **Citizens Jury Project Report December 2008**

### **Summary**

In December of 2008, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in nine (9) courthouse locations in New York City and Westchester for six to twelve hours per week.<sup>1</sup> The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In December, 320 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 331 questions or comments. The low number of jurors approaching is most directly related to the December holidays; several courthouses stopped calling jurors on or about December 16<sup>th</sup>.

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to CJP at each site. It also includes one general recommendation.

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 December of 2008.<sup>2</sup> At two (2) sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. Because these questions do not vary greatly from location to location, or from month to month, CJP will not set out examples by courthouse in this report.<sup>3</sup> At one (1) courthouse, three categories had the same number of questions/comments: appreciative comments, procedural questions and location questions.

**General Recommendation:** Video programs for jurors waiting to serve:

Numerous courthouses have something for jurors to watch while waiting in assembly rooms. At least one facility shows movies, and others run talk shows or news channels for jurors to enjoy. CJP suggests that additional programming be made available as well. Offerings could include historical, cultural or other types of shows, relating to New York City and State, for instance.

Recently, thanks to the Mayor's Office of Adult Education, CJP became aware of a film series which will be shown in 2009 on New York City's television station, Channel 25. It is possible that certain films from this series would be of interest to many jurors who could (but wouldn't have to) watch them. CJP will share them with the Office of Court Administration (OCA), so that OCA can consider the appropriateness of these videos.

## New York County

**60 Centre Street:** During December, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 24 jurors with 24 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (12). Four (4) late jurors approached interns. There were three (3) appreciative comments, including, *“It (jury duty) was very nice very well organized.”*

**100 Centre Street:** During December, 14 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 15 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (6). There were five (5) juror complaints. One juror said, *“There should be more benches outside the room where judges and attorneys question jurors. While we were waiting, dozens of people were lining the walls and sitting on the floor.”* The same juror said, *“A vending machine was full of delicious looking water - but had no cups.”*

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** During December, 38 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 40 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (14). Eleven (11) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

**111 Centre Street, 11th floor:** During December, 11 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 12 questions and comments. There were three (3) appreciative comments: *“Compliments to the jury room staff for room 1121. The senior clerk was pleasant, informative and made a less than pleasant experience much better than it might have been.”*; *“Jury service has improved a lot over the years. The time is shorter and the jury staff is very pleasant and enjoyable. I enjoy performing jury service now.”*; and, *“Everything seems perfect. The gentleman (Walter) is very nice. Also, the staff.”* There were three (3) questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and three (3) questions concerning the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. A juror made the following suggestion: *“I am 68 years old, I live in uptown Manhattan. I don't mind serving, but the travel is horrible, especially now that I have trouble walking. Taking the train during rush hour is the worst. There should be a van to drive the elderly to court.”*

## Kings County

**320 Jay Street:** During December, 69 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 73 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (31). Eleven (11) questions involved the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Eight (8) jurors had questions about postponements and difficulty with jury service.

**360 Adams Street:** During December, 30 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 31 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (14).

## Bronx County

**215 East 161st Street:** During December, 57 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 58 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (27). Twenty-four (24) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

## Queens County

**Kew Gardens:** During December, 38 jurors approached interns with 43 questions. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (29). Five (5) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were three (3) appreciative comments, as well as a suggestion from a single juror: *“I recently served at the above courthouse (Kew Gardens). The room was clean, the chairs comfortable and a number of computers were available. The only problem was that there were numerous tv’s throughout the room leaving not one quiet section. How about one reading area?”*.

## Westchester

**111 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd:** During December, 34 jurors approached interns with 35 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (24). Eight (8) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were also two (2) suggestions: *“Make it clearer where jurors are supposed to park when called in on the first day.”*, and to have *“Change machines for the meters.”*

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<sup>1</sup> 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 pm. Additionally, interns occasionally report that jurors have been discharged early, meaning, of course, that there is no one left to approach them.

<sup>2</sup> 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?”

<sup>3</sup> 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?”