



Citizens Jury Project Report February 2008

Summary

In February 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 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 February, 517 jurors approached the booths with 527 questions or comments.

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

Inquiries about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse were the most common juror questions at eight (8) CJP sites in February of 2008.² At the remaining site, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. Three (3) locations received a significant number of appreciative comments.

General Recommendation and Note:

Recommendation: 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, such as outside the general assembly rooms, by the elevators, and by the CJP Ombudservice booth.³

Note: Procedure – Many questions that interns are asked concern procedure and what jurors can and are required to do.⁴ As the 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.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During February, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 99 jurors with 99 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (71 inquiries). **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report.*

100 Centre Street: During February, 107 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 109 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (58). Sixteen (16) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Additionally there were eight (8) complaints⁵ and eight (8) appreciative comments.⁶ **Recommendations:** *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report. Consider commendation for court personnel as a result of the appreciative comments.*

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During February, 30 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 30 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (21). **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report.*

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During February, the CJP Ombudservice booth addressed comments from 25 jurors, who approached with 25 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (16). There were also four (4) complaints.⁷ **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report.*

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During February, 77 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 77 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (33). The next most commonly asked questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (16). Additionally, CJP interns noted that ten (10) other jurors who approached them were late; primarily, they asked where to go and what to do. *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report.*

360 Adams Street: During February, 72 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 79 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (20). The next most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (19). In addition, there were eight (8) appreciative comments.⁸ **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation and Notes at the beginning of this report. Consider commendation for court personnel as a result of the appreciative comments.*

Bronx County

During February, 77 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 77 questions and comments.⁹ The most common questions (29) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were sixteen (16) late jurors who approached interns. **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report. In addition, given the large number of late jurors, Bronx County should consider a dedicated entrance for jurors who are required to wait in the general security line.*

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During February, CJP interns recorded 24 questions and comments from 23 jurors. The most common questions (12) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Next, there were four (4) appreciative comments.¹⁰ **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation at the beginning of this report. Consider commendation for court personnel as a result of the appreciative comments.*

Jamaica: During February, CJP interns recorded 5 questions and comments from 5 jurors. Questions about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse were the most frequently asked question at this location (2). No recommendations are being made at this time.

¹ Booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week; the Bronx booth is operated two days per week.

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?” Because the 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.

³ CJP has been informed that the 2008 OCA budget requests include signage for each facility in NYC. CJP has been invited “to do a walk through” with OCA representatives when OCA begins its review, probably in late April.

⁴ Questions regarding procedure and what jurors can and are required to do often 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?”

⁵ Complaints included the following: “This is ridiculous because that room is filled to the brim and the people out here cannot hear a single thing!”; and “The seats are uncomfortable.” Several of the complaints were unrelated to the courthouse, for instance “Lots of drawn out proceedings. Lots of time spent waiting.”

⁶ Appreciative comments included: “The person in charge, as well as those working with him are warm, personable and with great sense of humor. The information given was done concisely and [with] real concern for our needs.”; “Very Civilized”; “Nice to have a women’s room that is clean”; “It seems pretty efficient. Only a two day commitment.”; and “Judge Kaye is fabulous.”

⁷ Complaints included: “This room needs more ventilation.” and “Why do they keep us here? I mean if it's 3 o'clock and they they're not going to call anyone else, why don't they just tell us to leave? It's a waste of time, it makes no sense.” The latter complaint may suggest that additional or repeated explanations as to why jurors are being kept in the assembly room are warranted; for instance, “I know it's late in the day, and you may be wondering what you are waiting for. The reason is that a judge may still call for a panel.”

⁸ The following appreciative comments came from the same juror, whose experience was likely representative of other jurors as well.

Just wanted to say that it was a tremendously pleasant experience. Much has changed since my prior two sessions. I was thrilled and surprised by the free wireless, public access terminals and closed captioned news broadcasts.

The internal speaker system coupled with permission to go to the lounge for cell phone use/snacks/restroom facilities is quite civilized, and it was clear to my fellow empanelled jurors that a lot of thought and effort was made to ensure we didn't sit around waiting for long periods of time.

The clerk was wonderful. He made the daily announcements (which must be so boring to him) captivating and funny, and our court officer was also quite pleasant and personable. The judge was even thoughtful enough to come to the juror's quarters to wish us well after the case was dismissed.

Overall, it was a really good experience. Kudos to all who made it so.

⁹ This number is less than a third of the number of jurors who approached interns in January (238). The obvious conclusion is that the opening of the new Bronx courthouse accounts for (much of) the difference.

¹⁰ Examples of appreciative comments included: “This jury duty process here is very well organized. I was expecting a mess.”; and “I am very satisfied with the services provided at Kew Gardens. I am very surprised that this court house provides wi-fi service. I am so pleased because I am able to get a lot of my work done on the computer for my job.”