



Citizens Jury Project Report May 2010

Summary

In May 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 May, 582 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 603 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 May 2010.² At two (2) sites, the greatest number of questions concerned procedure.³

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

- **Summons:** update the Manhattan summons to indicate how long jurors will serve *at a minimum*;
- **Seniors:** look for additional ways to alert seniors who will have significant difficulty serving - *before they come to the courthouse* - that court personnel are understanding about problems the elderly may have in traveling, etc.; one possible method of letting jurors know that they may not be required to travel to the courthouse, but rather may be able to share proof of a relevant problem via mail or internet, include an addition to the nyjuror.gov website highlighting “Seniors”; another method would be for court personnel to make a brief statement during juror orientations, in the hope that word of mouth would help to alert many seniors over time;
- **Phones:** reinstall payphones in the Bronx Criminal Courthouse, or, allow jurors to bring their cell phones, *if*, as a juror said, those who bring their phones are permitted to keep them; and;
- **Grand Jurors:** a grand juror, who unfortunately did not tell us the courthouse at which s/he served, said the following: “*Jurors need to enter in a different entrance. We are out there with criminal defendants on cases we are sitting on! This is very uncomfortable.*” (The juror’s full comment is set out, below, under the “Virtual Ombudservice” section of the report.) CJP deals only minimally with grand jury service, and cannot know whether, how long, or with what frequency grand jurors are “out there” with criminal defendants. It may be that existing security is enough to deal with this issue. Not knowing the answer, or being in a position to find out, CJP recommends that the question be considered, by those involved in the criminal courts.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During May, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 168 jurors with 173 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (103). Thirty-four (34) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Sixteen (16) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Four (4) jurors raised questions concerning qualifications to serve.

100 Centre Street: During May, 60 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 62 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (32). Nine (9) late jurors approached interns, and nine (9) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Three (3) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving.

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During May, 73 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 76 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (39). Twelve (12) questions were asked in regard to postponement or difficulty in serving. Nine (9) questions were asked about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One (1) juror complained “*I was unaware how many days I would need to block off! The summonses should [give this information].*” Another juror suggested “*We should be more lenient to people over 65! They have more stress to deal with!*”

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During May, 64 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 66 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (50). Five (5) questions were asked concerning each of the following: procedure and what jurors could/were required to do; postponement or difficulty in serving; and qualifications to serve.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During May, 61 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 63 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (31). Nineteen (19) questions were asked in regard to the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Five (5) questions had to do with postponements or difficulty serving. Four (4) questions concerned qualifications to serve.

360 Adams Street: During May, 36 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 37 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (23). Eight (8) questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Two (2) late jurors approached interns.

Bronx County

215 East 161st Street: During May, 57 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 60 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (30). Eight (8) questions were asked regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Six (6) questions concerned postponements and difficulty in serving. Three (3) questions were related to qualifications to serve. Two (2) jurors complained about there not being payphones; one of them said *“We are instructed not to bring our cell phones, but there are no payphones to use! Plus, everyone has a phone anyway!”* One (1) juror suggested that the courthouse have speakers (for calling names) in the hall.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During May, 41 jurors approached interns with 43 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 were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Four (4) were asked about postponements and difficulty in serving. One (1) juror offered this appreciative comment: *“I love the changes that were made!”*

Nassau County

Mineola: During February, 19 jurors approached interns with 19 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (10). Two (2) jurors asked questions about parking, not being sure if they were parked legally. One (1) juror informed an intern that more juror pamphlets were needed, and another one (1) that the water cooler needed to be refilled.

Virtual Ombudservice

In May, the following comment was received (amongst others) via the virtual ombudservice. Courthouse locations were not specified, though CJP encourages jurors to leave this information.

I'm on a grand jury. 1) The jury system should be more like Rockland County. Jurors should call in the day before - this would make things smoother, and we wouldn't have to be here a whole day if we didn't need to be. 2) The people here are pretty helpful. 3) Jurors need to enter in a different entrance. We are out there with criminal defendants on cases we are sitting on! This is very uncomfortable.

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?”