

## **Court Participants Help Inform the Courts' 2008-2012 Strategic Plan**

The District of Columbia Courts are drafting our 2008-2012 Strategic Plan. The new Plan will continue the important work begun under the current Plan, *Committed to Justice in the Nation's Capital, Strategic Plan of the District of Columbia Courts, 2003-2007*. To inform the new Strategic Plan, the Courts administered surveys and held focus group for court users as well as attorneys, judges, and employees to see what we do well, what we can improve on, and what we should accomplish in the future. We have heard from nearly 2,500 persons including litigants and their families, jurors, attorneys, police officers, social workers, our judiciary and court personnel.

The largest group of persons surveyed was court participants – the persons we serve everyday. On January 29, 2007, 1,400 persons conducting business with the Courts completed a questionnaire designed to gauge how well we are doing.

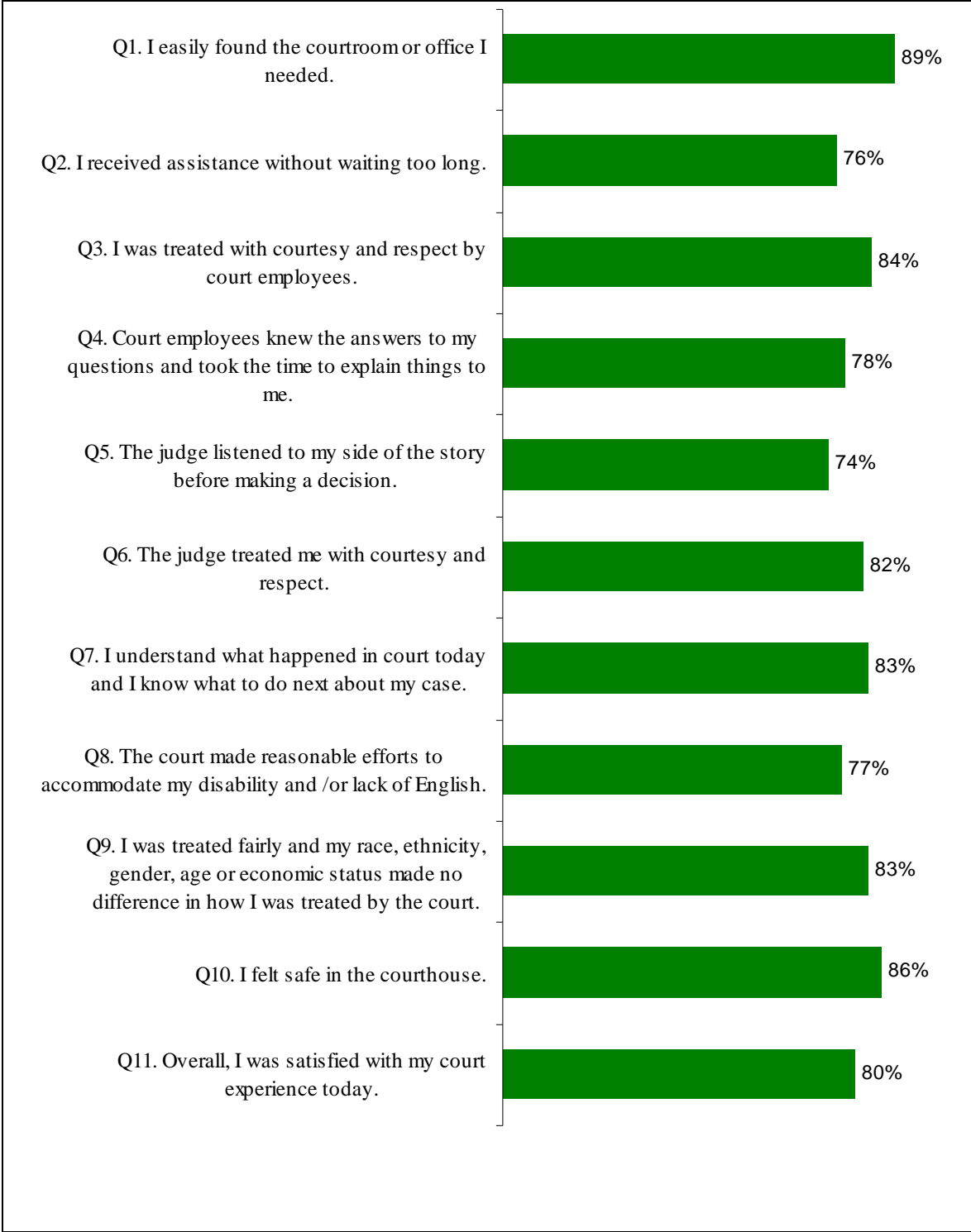
Adopting a best practice recommendation of the National Center for State Courts, we surveyed court users on a single, typical day in the courthouse. Approximately 45 judicial officers and employees, including Chief Judge Washington and Chief Judge King, volunteered at least an hour of their time to hand out surveys and encourage participation. Volunteers wore “You Be the Judge” t-shirts to make them visible to court users. They handed out and collected surveys at entrances and exits in the Moultrie Courthouse and Buildings A and B.

This survey is especially important because it tells whether court users feel that the Courts are accessible and treat people with fairness and respect. Many people assume that “winning” or “losing” is what matters most to citizens when dealing with the courts. However, research shows that positive perceptions of the court are shaped more by court users’ feelings of how they are treated in court and whether the court’s process of making decisions seems fair.

The 1,400 persons completing the survey marked an increase of approximately 100% over the number of respondents to a similar survey conducted in 2002. The results showed improvement in several areas. For example, in 2007, 76% of respondents agreed with the statement “I received assistance without waiting too long,” compared to 60% in 2002. Further, 78% of 2007 respondents agreed that “Court employees knew the answers to my questions and took the time to explain things to me” compared to 68% in 2002. Other responses were similarly positive, as shown in Figure 1 below. On a key measure of fairness, 85% of respondents agreed with the statement “I was treated fairly and my race, ethnicity, gender, age or economic status made no difference in how I was treated by the court.”

We are pleased with the number of respondents as well as the ratings, but will use the results as constructive criticism to help us get better in these important areas of access and fairness. As the Courts move forward with a new Strategic Plan in 2008, we will continue the substantial work begun to achieve our Vision – Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All.”

**Figure 1: Court Participant Survey Results**  
*Percent Reporting “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” with Each Question*





Chief Judge King listens to a court participant while handing out surveys.



Chief Judge Washington tells a court user: "You be the Judge – tell us how we are doing."



Volunteers in the Moultrie Courthouse hand out surveys.