

Public trust and confidence in the judicial branch is at the core of maintaining a peaceful and democratic society. The judicial branch must consistently strive to maintain and improve the public’s trust and confidence by: fulfilling its mission of protecting rights and liberties, upholding and interpreting the law, and providing for the peaceful resolution of disputes; and by achieving its vision of being accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable to all Floridians. *Regardless of the economic and political challenges, the branch must remain steadfast in its commitment to maintain and consistently build the public’s trust and confidence.*

Survey respondents in 2008 reported higher levels of trust and confidence in Florida’s courts than did respondents to a survey in 1996. Nevertheless, confusion still exists among the public about the role, purposes, and function of courts, and a compelling need remains to better educate and inform the public about the role and accomplishments of the branch, according to recent survey findings. Effective public education about the courts helps to better inform the public and positively shape public perception and understanding of the judicial branch. These ongoing efforts are vitally important to enhancing public trust and confidence. Public perception of the judicial branch is also influenced by political pressures, high profile cases, the print and broadcast news media, and the entertainment industry that may unduly distort opinions or expectations concerning the courts.

To fulfill its mission and achieve its vision, the judicial branch must perform its duties with impartiality, integrity, and honesty. Additionally, the courts’ performance must be perceived to be fair and free from systemic bias, particularly concerning race. In a recent public survey of court users, African-Americans reported the lowest levels of confidence in the judicial branch. The judicial branch must continue to work diligently to eliminate biases and to reduce any perception of bias as it guarantees procedural and outcome fairness and objectivity.

Finally, the State Courts System can enhance public trust and confidence by maintaining the highest standards of accountability for its use of public resources, adhering to statutory and constitutional mandates, and continuing to improve its overall performance. *The State Courts System should inform the public, demonstrate transparency, and ultimately maintain and build the public’s trust and confidence by regularly and accurately reporting on its use of resources and its accomplishments.*

Long-Range Issue #5—Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence

Goal 5.1: The State Courts System will be accountable to the public for its use of public resources and overall performance.

Strategies:

- 5.1(a) Monitor and evaluate court performance.
- 5.1(b) Communicate and inform the public and the executive and legislative branches of government about the State Courts System performance and use of public resources.
- 5.1(c) Inform the public and policy makers about judicial branch accomplishments.
- 5.1(d) Solicit regular feedback and institutionalize lines of communication with the public, court users of all types, community organizations, and justice system partners to improve judicial branch performance.

Goal 5.2: The public will better understand the purpose and role of the judicial branch.

Strategies:

- 5.2(a) Educate and inform the public about the judicial branch as well as constitutional and legal principles.
- 5.2(b) Collaborate with the legal community and justice system partners to educate the public about the court system.
- 5.2(c) Enhance and expand outreach to all levels of educational institutions and community organizations to improve understanding of, and involvement with, the justice system.
- 5.2(d) Promote and improve relations with the media to ensure the accuracy and adequacy of public understanding and perception of the judicial branch.

Goal 5.3: The courts will be fair, impartial, and free from bias, political pressures, and special interests.

Strategies:

- 5.3(a) Protect and preserve the ability of judges to decide legal matters according to the constitution, the law, and legal precedent without fear of reprisal.
- 5.3(b) Improve communication between the judicial branch and the community.
- 5.3(c) Work to prevent bias, and the appearance of bias, in all parts of the judicial branch.