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The 2002-2004 Operational Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch

HORIZON 2004

2002-2004 Operational Plan Objectives

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A Message from the Chief Justice

Since September 11, 2001, there has been a lot of discussion about the Rule of Law and its importance in the world community, as well as its importance in our domestic society. Of course, as a practical matter, the Rule of Law in the United States is essentially provided by state court systems where well over 95% of judicial activity in our country takes place.

To maintain the Rule of Law, the Florida court system has a vision: that justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable. This goal is a noble one that is not easily achieved. But steady progress can and should be made. Like its predecessor plans, *Horizon 2000* and *Horizon 2002*, *Horizon 2004*, the *2002-2004 Operational Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch*, directs the course of Florida's courts toward that destination.

A long distance has already been traveled. Florida has been a leader in many areas: openness of court proceedings and records; easier access to the court process for litigants who proceed without attorneys; special dockets to help drug users overcome their addictions; innovations in saving the time of jurors; continuing specialized education for judges; high levels of efficiency and timeliness in processing a large volume of cases; and more. Florida's court system today is one of the best in the country, and is looked to internationally as a model of an efficient, effective, modern court system.

While these successes are laudable, they must be sustained, and there are other areas that we know can be improved as well. Florida's courts are entering into an historic transformation, a change that will influence the quality of our justice system for many years to come. Therefore, in the period of this two-year plan, the State Courts System's first priority will be the implementation of court funding reform. Effective July 1, 2004, much of the cost of administering our trial courts, traditionally paid by individual counties, will be paid for by the State of Florida. The citizens of Florida mandated this reform in 1998 when they approved a constitutional amendment, known as "Revision 7," proposed by the Constitutional Revision Commission.

This is not simply a change in funding sources, but the second phase of an overhaul of Florida's court system commenced in 1972, when the courts became *organizationally* unified under a judicial article of the Florida Constitution. While organizationally unified since 1972, the court system remained *fiscally* fragmented. Much of its funding continued to come from the counties, resulting in disparities in the quality and availability of court services among the counties. Less affluent counties were often unable to cover even the basic costs of running the courts. Under Revision 7, funding by the State of Florida will lead to a true state court system.

A MESSAGE

from the

CHIEF

JUSTICE

IMPLEMENTING

COURT

FUNDING

REFORM

It is our hope that this change will occur with no negative impact on service for the people of Florida. The successful management of this transition over the next two years will be critical to the ability of Florida courts to administer justice fairly, efficiently, effectively and independently for many years to come. You will see this priority – attention to the implementation of Revision 7 – woven throughout many of the objectives outlined in this plan.

It is vital that Revision 7 be fully implemented consistent with its intent if the people of Florida are to enjoy a consistently high-quality court system in every courthouse, in every part of this state.

As we move forward with Revision 7, several underlying principles guide us:

- ▶ EQUITY. The structure and funding of judicial branch activities and services should provide equal access to justice in all courts of the state.
- ▶ INDEPENDENCE. The independence of the courts – in the adjudication of cases and the administration of the court system – must be maintained.
- ▶ ACCOUNTABILITY. The judicial branch will be accountable to the people of Florida for the expenditure of public funds and the efficiency of judicial operations.
- ▶ RESPONSIVENESS. The governance and management infrastructure of the courts must be responsive to the needs of the people.

PROTECTING
CHILDREN
and HELPING
FAMILIES

Our second priority is a firm commitment to the well being of children who find themselves or their families in court. While the affairs of many citizens are directly affected by decisions made by our courts, it is the lives of children who come under the jurisdiction of the courts that are often the most profoundly influenced. We in the justice system should feel enormously privileged that society has placed its most troubled children on our doorstep. This represents an enormous challenge and opportunity to effect positive and constructive change in our society by assisting in positive and constructive changes in the lives of our troubled children. If there is any place where our most precious resource, our children, should come first, it is in our halls of justice.

Almost half of the cases in Florida’s circuit courts – 360,000 cases in 2001 – are domestic relations, dependency, delinquency or domestic violence cases. We must ensure that the judicial process operates to protect and support children whose lives intersect with the court system. As we continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of the judicial processes, we must pay particular attention to processes that affect children and families. We are firmly committed to this end.

Our third priority for the next two years is to not only continue, but to expand our efforts to capitalize on opportunities created by emerging technologies to improve the efficiency and more importantly the effectiveness of

our courts. Florida's courts have a long and successful tradition of adapting to changing times and using new technologies. Courts are information organizations: they collect information about individual court cases and process and analyze that information in order to reach decisions about what is to be done. Further, large numbers of cases must be managed, the use of court resources must be coordinated and monitored, and administrative and policy decisions must be made by court leaders. Information management systems continue to improve our ability to do all of these things.

As we move forward with the transition to state funding, we will systematically examine court operations to identify areas where the careful application of technology can increase efficiency and improve effectiveness. We have already made great advances in the use of technology, and are confident there are significant opportunities to do more.

One final point should be made. As we establish these three priorities, we acknowledge that the five original long-range issues, as identified in the long-range strategic plan of the judicial branch, *Taking Bearings, Setting Course*, remain unchanged. They are:

- I. CLARIFYING THE ROLE OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH
- II. IMPROVING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE
- III. SUPPORTING COMPETENCE AND QUALITY
- IV. ENHANCING PUBLIC ACCESS AND SERVICE
- V. BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

The specific objectives and tasks included in *Horizon 2004* address implementation of Revision 7, protecting children and families, and improving the operation of the courts through technology. Beyond these, ongoing efforts that have already been undertaken to improve our courts will continue as resources and funding permit. The judicial branch is committed to staying its long-range course in order to realize its vision.

Respectfully,



Harry Lee Anstead

IMPROVING
EFFICIENCY and
EFFECTIVENESS
THROUGH
TECHNOLOGY

**The VISION
of the FLORIDA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH:
JUSTICE IN
FLORIDA WILL BE
ACCESSIBLE, FAIR,
EFFECTIVE,
RESPONSIVE, AND
ACCOUNTABLE.**

I. ROLE OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

Long-Range Goals

The role and responsibilities of Florida's judicial branch will be clearly defined.

The roles and responsibilities of the courts will be widely understood.

Essential court-related services that are not within the roles or responsibilities of the courts will be provided by organizations outside of the judicial branch.

I-A Judicial Independence

OBJECTIVE:

Advance judicial branch positions on constitutional, executive, and legislative proposals affecting the operation of the courts to ensure that the vision and mission of the judicial branch are served.

DISCUSSION:

Judicial independence is a cornerstone of the United States' system of government. Decisions of the legislative and executive branches that affect the administration of justice should be made with the benefit of input from the judicial branch. The State Courts System should develop appropriate institutional mechanisms to provide input on matters relating to the administration of justice.

TASK:

The State Courts System will refine policies and procedures regarding appropriate mechanisms to express branch positions on constitutional, legislative, and executive proposals affecting the administration of the judicial branch.

I-B Court Functions

OBJECTIVE:

Clearly define those activities and functions that are essential to the mission of the courts, and those activities and functions that must be integrated into the operations of the courts to effectuate public policy and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of court operations.

DISCUSSION:

The process of systematically identifying functions of the courts that are directed to the mission of the courts and those that are directed to a public policy should continue. This clarification will provide a point of reference for policy discussions concerning the proper role and scope of responsibility of the courts. Implementation of Revision 7 will provide a unique opportunity to conclusively develop a consensus on the role of the courts and the purpose of specific activities performed by courts.

Some activities that are currently carried out by courts may be more appropriately carried out by entities outside of the State Courts System. These activities should be identified and efforts should be made to relocate them to a more appropriate institution.

TASKS:

1. The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability will study trial court services and activities in order to fully define and clarify their purposes, identifying those that support the mission of the courts and those which support public policy.
 2. The Trial Court Budget Commission will study and provide recommendations regarding appropriate relocation and funding of trial court-related programs and resources that are not within the roles and responsibilities of the courts and thus not included in the state assumption of trial court costs under Revision 7 of Article V of the Florida Constitution.
 3. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will monitor and advise the Supreme Court on a transition plan for relocating the Guardian ad Litem Program to another entity.
-

I-C Intergovernmental Relations

OBJECTIVE:

Collaborate with other branches of state and local government to clarify roles and responsibilities and promote models of service coordination that will respond effectively to the needs of individuals and communities.

DISCUSSION:

Changes to the Florida Constitution and laws compel the State Courts System to plan and coordinate efforts with other parts of state and local government. To provide more effective service to the public, the State Courts System should also enhance its capability to coordinate the work of the courts with state and local agencies. Systemic, sustained collaboration with state, local, and community service providers is especially critical to the court's ability to solve problems and deliver quality justice. This coordination can be carried out through structured, institutional mechanisms that clarify roles and responsibilities and facilitate communication at the state level. In addition, local coordination will help the courts and other governmental entities to clearly understand their respective responsibilities, to coordinate budgeting and policy development, and to provide more effective service to the people.

TASKS:

1. The Supreme Court, through its various commissions and committees, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator, will continue to develop structured strategies designed to clarify and communicate the roles and responsibilities of the courts in relation to other state and local government entities.
2. Supreme Court commissions and committees and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will facilitate the development of systemic models of service coordination between the courts and other state and local agencies.
3. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will provide assistance to the judicial circuits in communicating with county commissions and other local government entities about the roles and responsibilities of the courts.
4. The Task Force on Treatment-Based Drug Courts will assist representatives of the executive and legislative branches in their efforts to develop a comprehensive, coordinated state policy to address the destructive impact of substance abuse on individuals, families, and communities.

I-C Intergovernmental Relations

5. The Judicial Management Council will provide recommendations and guidance to the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court on the goals and objectives for the long-range plan of the judicial branch and other statewide issues affecting multiple levels of the court system or multiple constituencies in the court and justice community, as provided by rule 2.125, Florida Rules of Judicial Administration.

 6. The chief judge of each appellate and trial court will identify an emergency management team to develop an emergency management protocol. The teams should establish communication links with appropriate federal, state and local agencies to foster coordination of emergency management resources and ensure continuity of court operations in the event situations that could disrupt mission-essential judicial functions.
-

I-D Community Collaboration

OBJECTIVE:

Provide judicial leadership establishing collaborative efforts with community service providers to enhance judicial effectiveness while preserving the rule of law.

DISCUSSION:

Courts often serve as a front-line response to problems such as substance abuse, family breakdown and mental illness. The court system is only one of several principal players in resolving these problems. Judicial leadership in ensuring court and community collaboration is essential to improve the administration of justice and produce better outcomes for individuals and communities.

TASK:

The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court, the Task Force on Treatment-Based Drug Courts, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will provide leadership in the development of models of service coordination between the courts and community service providers.

II. THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Long-Range Goals The judicial branch will fairly and timely resolve issues brought before it.
Adequate provision will be made for the needs of the court system and funds will be expended prudently.

II-A Court Funding Structures

OBJECTIVE:

Identify and promote a funding structure for the State Courts System that is consistent with the intent of the Florida Constitution, including Revision 7.

DISCUSSION:

Florida voters amended the state constitution to require that significant responsibilities for funding the courts be shifted from counties to the state. To prepare for this change, the State Courts System must develop the organizational capacity to make this transition while protecting several central principles: the courts must be sufficiently funded to fulfill their constitutional mission; there should be a proper balance among state funding, local requirements, and county obligations; a revised revenue framework should balance user fees and imposed court costs and fines with access to the courts; and a balance must be achieved between statewide policy, budgetary accountability and local responsibility for court management and administration.

The overall goal is to implement new funding structures that do not substantially undermine the effective and efficient operation of the courts, while establishing a new balance between statewide policy and budgeting, and local control and autonomy.

TASKS:

1. The Trial Court Budget Commission, the District Court of Appeal Budget Commission, the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability, the Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability, the Florida Courts Technology Commission, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will collaborate in the development of a budgeting framework that expresses the fiscal resources needed to effectively administer the trial and appellate courts.
 2. The Trial Court Budget Commission will identify and recommend those trial court activities that should be the fiscal responsibility of the state and those that should be the fiscal responsibility of county government.
-

II-B Performance and Accountability

OBJECTIVE:

Promote court performance and accountability by ensuring that managers have relevant and timely information necessary to monitor and enhance court operations.

DISCUSSION:

The judicial branch has embarked on an initiative to ensure a high level of court performance and accountability by providing court managers with accurate, timely information on the performance and operations of their courts. This information includes performance indicators for the processing of cases in each area of law, and performance of certain court programs. This information will allow court managers to enhance court performance by identifying and addressing workflow and resource allocation issues in a systematic, continuous manner. Ongoing development of the branch's performance and accountability system should continue with implementation of an information infrastructure to collect data to support decision making regarding court policies, resource distribution, court management, legislative impact assessment and overall performance, and to provide an accountability mechanism.

TASKS:

1. The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability will study and make recommendations to the Supreme Court regarding a comprehensive court resource and court performance measurement, improvement, and accountability system for the trial courts.
 2. The Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability will analyze and make recommendations regarding district court of appeal workload and resource measurement systems, including judicial workload and certification of need for district court of appeal judges.
 3. The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability will coordinate the development of uniform criminal data reporting procedures for timeliness and performance measures; monitor the process and methods of data analysis, and make recommendations on ways to improve the integrity of the process and the quality of the data.
 4. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will collect output measures for activities identified in the Long-Range Program Plan.
-

II-C Court Resources

OBJECTIVE:

Maximize the availability and use of critical court support resources and activities, including a full range of dispute resolution mechanisms, required for the efficient and effective disposition of cases.

DISCUSSION:

The quality, timeliness, and efficiency of decision-making by the judiciary are enhanced by an array of court support resources. The judicial branch's performance and accountability system must regularly assess the use and benefits of these resources, and share this information with those who can help to continuously improve how, when and where these resources are deployed.

During the 2002-2004 biennium, performance reviews will be conducted for support resources associated with expert witnesses, including psychological evaluation, court reporting, court interpretation, masters and hearing officers, and court-connected mediation.

TASKS:

1. The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability will coordinate studies on the effective and efficient utilization of the trial court support resources associated with expert witnesses, including psychological evaluators, court reporting, court interpretation, masters and hearing officers, trial court legal support resources, and court-connected mediation as well as the development of best-practice guidelines for judicial and court managers on the use of these resources.
 2. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will determine the resources necessary to implement the model unified family court and provide this detailed information to the Trial Court Budget Commission.
 3. The Dispute Resolution Center will assess the utility of dependency mediation and if appropriate, assist trial courts that do not currently have mediation services with obtaining such services and will assist courts in under-served areas in developing county court mediation services.
 4. The Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules, the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy and the Dispute Resolution Center will evaluate the need for, and if appropriate, recommend rules to govern the use of mediation in appellate cases, including development of appropriate qualifications and training requirements.
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II-D Juror Utilization

OBJECTIVE:

Ensure that the service of jurors and potential jurors is meaningful and responsive to the needs of the individual jurors and the justice system.

DISCUSSION:

Jurors and potential jurors represent a unique and essential component in the judicial process. The time and service of jurors are valuable assets that the judicial branch values and respects greatly. Efforts to improve Florida's jury system, including steps to decrease demands placed on citizens' time and to enhance the meaningful participation of jurors in the judicial process, should continue.

TASK:

The Office of the State Courts Administrator will confer with the trial courts to implement the Judicial Management Council's recommendations relating to juror management and administration, in-court processes, and juror treatment and compensation, as currently under consideration by the Supreme Court of Florida.

II-E Technology

OBJECTIVE:

Identify and utilize information technologies that enhance court services and functions, and promote effective judicial decision-making.

DISCUSSION:

The electronic transmission, storage, and retrieval of court information afford opportunities to dramatically increase the effectiveness of the courts by enhancing the quality, timeliness and efficiency of decision-making. To make effective use of these technologies, including case management and court reporting technologies, the branch should: develop technological and functional standards for those automated systems that provide information to the trial and appellate court systems; articulate requirements for effective internal integration of systems applications; seek integration of systems with local justice system partners to maximize information sharing; improve functionality of management reports and vertical reporting; and capitalize on the use of the World Wide Web for court applications. These efforts will require coordinated development of policy, budgeting, and implementation among the State Courts System, county governments, clerks of court, and other governmental agencies.

TASKS:

1. The Florida Courts Technology Commission will advance the development of technological and functional standards for those automated systems that provide information to the trial and appellate court systems, and improve functionality of management reports.
2. The Office of the State Courts Administrator and the Florida Courts Technology Commission will explore requirements for the integration of systems with local justice system partners to maximize information sharing.
3. The Florida Courts Technology Commission will recommend requirements for effective internal integration of systems applications.
4. The Office of the State Courts Administrator and other staff of the Supreme Court will research, and advance as appropriate, the use of the World Wide Web for court applications to increase access to the state courts network.

continued . . .

II-E Technology

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5. The Florida Courts Technology Commission will consider the report of the Work Group on Emergency Preparedness and make recommendations relating to security of court records stored electronically.
 6. The Electronic Filing Committee will review plans regarding the implementation of electronic filing of documents and make recommendations to ensure adequate public access and uniformity and compatibility among courts.
 7. The Florida Courts Technology Commission will oversee the development of the Automated Sentencing Project, which will provide a rapid, accurate, automated sentencing contemporaneously with the pronouncement of criminal sentences, and will allow for the electronic transmission of the sentence to the Department of Corrections. The project will also include development of an annual report of the assessments ordered by judges statewide.
 8. The Florida Courts Technology Commission will make recommendations to the Supreme Court on policies standardizing technology capabilities and infrastructures within the trial courts.
 9. The Trial Courts Technology Commission and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will work with the State Technology Office and other state agencies to develop an integrated and secure information system capable allowing judges single query access to five state agency data sources, the Department of Law Enforcement, Department of Children and Families, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Corrections, and Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, as well as the clerk's Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS).
 10. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will work to ensure that the state's new personnel, finance and accounting systems will meet the needs of the judicial branch and provide for the most efficient and effective use of court resources.
-

II-F Court Improvement Initiatives

OBJECTIVE:

Identify and implement court operational practices and procedures that protect children, strengthen families, and assist other vulnerable Floridians.

DISCUSSION:

The effectiveness and efficiency of court processes can be systematically improved through structured initiatives that address factors in the judicial handling of particular classes of cases. Court improvement initiatives document the flow of information and decision-making, and provide an opportunity for instituting improvements in case processing, as well as timeliness of judicial decision-making. Where appropriate, initiatives can include consideration of recommendations regarding revision of relevant statutes and rules. Efforts may also include consideration of the value of non-adversarial, alternative models of justice for the handling of appropriate classes of cases.

Opportunities for improvement in the processing of cases exist in every area of court jurisdiction. Information generated through the judicial branch performance and accountability initiative will provide data that can form the basis for improvement. Mission statements should be developed for each area of the trial courts, which, together with performance data, will guide court improvement initiatives in each area, beginning with the unified family court. Initiatives should result in the development of models, standards, best practices, and other management education materials in each area examined.

TASKS:

1. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will identify unified family court best practices and develop specific recommendations and strategies for their implementation, including ways to provide technical assistance and training opportunities to assist the trial courts in accomplishing a fully integrated, comprehensive approach to cases involving children and families.
2. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will provide guidance on the requirements of the federal dependency court improvement grant, including the development of a corrective action plan to assist the trial courts in meeting time standard requirements in achieving permanency and safety for children who are abused and neglected.

continued . . .

II-F Court Improvement Initiatives

. . . continued

3. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will develop recommendations for enhancing juvenile delinquency systems, taking the principles of balanced and restorative justice into consideration; identify strategies for facilitating the efficient and expeditious resolution of family court cases involving child support and parenting issues; make recommendations as to how family courts can promote the safety of victims and children in cases involving domestic violence; review issues related to the availability of representation of children and make recommendations, as appropriate; and recommend ways in which courts can provide more meaningful access to self-represented litigants in family law cases, including parents in dependency cases.
 4. The Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy will develop, if appropriate, recommendations for handling criminal cases in a manner consistent with the principles of restorative justice; the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules will evaluate the need for and, if appropriate, recommend rules to govern the use of mediation in criminal and juvenile delinquency cases.
 5. The Task Force on Treatment-Based Drug Courts, in consultation with the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court, will recommend statewide standards for the judicial administration of juvenile drug court cases and dependency drug court cases.
-

III. COMPETENCE AND QUALITY

Long-Range Goals

Judges and court personnel will be prepared to administer justice fairly, effectively, and in a professional and competent manner.

Judges and court personnel will serve the diverse population of Florida with respect and without bias.

Judges, court personnel and members of the bar will adhere to high standards of professionalism, ethics, and personal behavior.

III-A Judicial Education

OBJECTIVE:

Continue to provide comprehensive and ongoing education and training opportunities to support effective and sound judicial decision-making, increase proficiency in case management, and ensure the highest level of professionalism.

DISCUSSION:

Florida's judicial education program is among the best in the nation. Ongoing education of judges is critical to the maintenance of quality in the courts. In addition to substantive legal education and training, judges must be able to address and understand a multitude of other relevant issues where appropriate. Such issues include enhancing listening and communication skills and skills for serving Florida's culturally diverse population, child development, mental health and substance abuse awareness, domestic violence dynamics, and family systems. The Special Committee on Evaluation and Administration of Florida's Judicial Education Programs advanced a comprehensive plan to enhance the organization, structure and substance of judicial education services in Florida that will improve the quality of judicial education programs, and expand the breadth, depth, and integration of educational offerings. The implementation of the report will continue during 2002-2004.

TASKS:

1. The Florida Court Education Council and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will continue to implement the recommendations by the Special Committee on Evaluation and Administration of Florida's Judicial Education Programs.

continued . . .

III-A Judicial Education

. . . continued

2. The Florida Court Education Council and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will develop written materials and publications to enhance the competence of the judiciary and court support personnel. In particular, the following projects will be completed: publication of the Juvenile Dependency Bench Book in paper and electronic formats; development and publication of a Judicial Ethics Manual; and development and publication of a Circuit - Criminal Bench Book.
 3. The Florida Court Education Council and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will study, develop and pilot distance learning courses to supplement current educational programming.
-

III-B Staff Education

OBJECTIVE:

Provide comprehensive and ongoing education and training opportunities for court support personnel in order to increase substantive knowledge and proficiency in case management and operational skills.

DISCUSSION:

Growing demands on the courts require that court managers and administrators have access to education and training necessary to prepare them to effectively manage court personnel, operations, technology and facilities. National efforts to develop curricula on the core competencies of court managers, together with empirical information generated to assist Florida courts in improving court management, will provide materials to support enhanced management training for chief judges, administrative judges, court administrators and their staffs.

The complexities of a modern court system require high-functioning and capable court support personnel to carry out their responsibilities. Current efforts to provide continuing education should be expanded into a comprehensive staff training system that provides educational services to personnel directly engaged in the handling of cases, including legal staff in the trial and appellate courts, hearing officers and masters, court reporting staff, court interpreters, as well as other support staff, including case managers and administrative and technology personnel.

TASKS:

1. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will seek the necessary resources to provide adequate education and training for court staff.
2. The Florida Courts Education Council and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will provide educational programs in the area of court management for chief judges, administrative judges, court administrators and staff.
3. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will develop and provide technical assistance and training opportunities for family court judges and staff.

continued . . .

III-B Staff Education

. . . continued

4. The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will oversee the development of best practice guidelines, or operations models, for the efficient and effective use of essential court resources, technical assistance and assessment tools for trial courts, and education opportunities for trial court judicial and staff resource managers.
 5. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will develop and provide training for trial court staff responsible for emergency preparedness and administrative duties relating to budget, finance and accounting, personnel, and purchasing.
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III-C Workforce Compensation

OBJECTIVE:

Recruit and retain a highly qualified, diverse, and skilled workforce by securing competitive compensation and benefits for court system personnel.

DISCUSSION:

To support competence and quality in courts, the judicial branch must provide competitive compensation and benefits to ensure high levels of employee retention and morale. This must be an integral part of the court system's implementation of Revision 7. Given employment conditions nationally and in Florida, particularly with respect to the highly skilled personnel required by courts, competitive compensation and benefits are critical to recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced staff. It is the obligation of the judicial branch to clearly document its personnel needs, and to advocate for fulfillment of those needs in its legislative budget requests.

Florida's diversity should be fully reflected in the operations of the judicial branch. Continuing efforts to ensure diversity should include attention to employment and contracting policies and practices, diversity awareness, and representation on policy advisory committees.

TASKS:

1. The Trial Court Budget Commission and the District Court of Appeal Budget Commission, in consultation with the Office of the State Courts Administrator, will assess the competitiveness of salaries and benefits of State Courts System employees and advance appropriate recommendations regarding staffing and total compensation needs.
 2. The Trial Court Budget Commission, in consultation with the Office of the State Courts Administrator, will undertake a classification and compensation review of county-funded court personnel who will become state employees due to Revision 7, develop a transition plan to ensure salaries are maintained and competitive, and create a consolidated classification plan for the trial courts that includes equity with consideration for local market conditions.
 3. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will oversee implementation of the adopted recommendations of the State Courts System Equal Opportunity Committee regarding recruitment and selection policies, including the annual workforce demographic reports.
-

IV. PUBLIC ACCESS AND SERVICE

- Long-Range Goals**
- All people will have equal access to courts.
 - People will be able to understand and utilize the judicial system.
 - Identify and remove physical barriers to court access.

IV-A Meaningful Access

OBJECTIVE:

Identify and remedy gaps in services for people who use the court system without the assistance of an attorney.

DISCUSSION:

Article I, Section 21 of the Florida Constitution requires that “the courts shall be open to every person for redress of any injury, and justice shall be administered without sale, denial or delay.” Courts must accommodate litigants’ access to justice in a way that is both meaningful and respectful, while preserving the rule of law and the impartiality of the judicial system. Court procedures, forms, and personnel should be customer friendly.

TASKS:

1. Each judicial circuit will review, further refine, and implement their specific action plans for addressing the needs of self-represented litigants.
 2. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will make recommendations on ways in which courts can provide more meaningful access to self-represented litigants in family cases, including parents in dependency cases.
-

IV-B Electronic Access to Court Records

OBJECTIVE:

Examine and develop policies regarding electronic access to court records that maintain a proper balance between public access, personal privacy, and public safety, while maintaining the integrity of the judicial process.

DISCUSSION:

The emergence of technologies to electronically transmit, store, and retrieve documents is changing the public's access to court records, allowing faster and more efficient retrieval. While litigants and others may benefit from this improved access, concerns arise regarding legitimate expectations of privacy. To appropriately balance public access to information and privacy interests, policies controlling electronic access to court records should be examined and the necessary policy adjustments made.

TASK:

The Judicial Management Council and the Office of the State Courts Administrator will monitor the Legislature's Study Committee on Public Records and address policies controlling electronic access to court records consistent with direction provided by the Supreme Court.

V. PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

- Long-Range Goals The judicial branch will inform the public about the functioning of the courts.
- The judicial branch will be responsive to the expectations of the public regarding the courts.

V-A Communication Plan	
OBJECTIVE:	DISCUSSION:
Implement the Judicial Branch Communication Plan, which includes: a) sustained outreach efforts designed to enhance public understanding and support for the unique role and responsibilities of the judicial branch in solving problems and administering justice; b) preparation and dissemination of useful information about court operations and processes; and c) collaborative strategies that will increase public respect for and confidence in the court system.	Courts rely upon public respect for the courts and the perceived legitimacy of the judicial process. As people understand the unique role of courts, they have increased respect for judicial decisions. Outreach efforts within local communities bring relevance to the judicial system and promote the court’s contributions to community life.
TASKS:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will undertake implementation of the judicial branch communication plan for 2000-2006, periodically review and update the plan, and assess progress made in implementing the plan.2. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will coordinate education and outreach to trial and appellate courts to assist them in developing public communication strategies and capabilities, specifically focusing on the Revision 7 education plan.	

V-A Communication Plan

3. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will continue to implement legislative communication strategies to facilitate legislative access to information about the processes, policies, and priorities of the judicial branch.
 4. The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court will assist the State Courts System in informing the public about the role and function of the unified family court.
 5. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will enhance the State Court System website for the benefit of the judiciary, court users and the public.
 6. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will coordinate the production and availability of presentation materials on selected court topics for judicial use.
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V-B Public Involvement

OBJECTIVE:

Encourage sustained public involvement in the administration of the court system to ensure the maximum contribution to the quality of justice and an appropriate and durable balance between the demands of judicial independence and accountability.

DISCUSSION:

Public involvement in the court process facilitates accountability and shared expectations, and increases public trust and confidence, ensuring that the courts are relevant providers of justice. Floridians can become involved in the court process when the court builds collaborative systems with state and community service providers. Likewise, the process of collaboration in court service areas, such as guardian ad litem and mediation programs, builds a public constituency for the courts.

TASKS:

1. The Florida Court Education Council will consider the incorporation of court-public communication education into judicial education programs.
 2. The Chief Justice will ensure that court committees include public member representation where such participation would appropriately contribute to the deliberations of the committee.
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For additional copies of this operational plan, contact:

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