



FLORIDA STATE COURTS

2016-2017

Annual Report



A preparatory drawing of one of the two eagle sculptures that adorn the rotunda of the Florida Supreme Court. Sculpted by Panama City artist Roland Hockett, the copper eagles, which have graced the rotunda since 1991, represent American patriotism and the ideals of justice that this country strives to achieve. Mr. Hockett donated a drawing of each sculpture to the court in July 2017.

THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

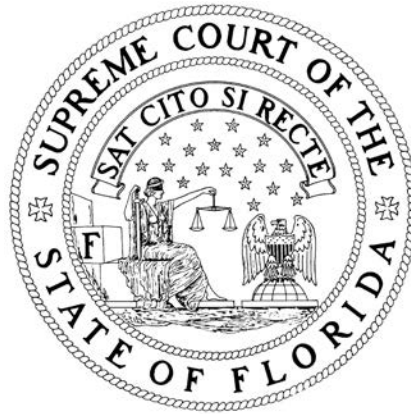
Florida State Courts Annual Report
July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017



Jorge Labarga
Chief Justice

Barbara J. Pariente
R. Fred Lewis
Peggy A. Quince
Charles T. Canady
Ricky Polston
C. Alan Lawson
Justices

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Chief Justice.....	1
July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017: The Year in Review.....	7
Long-Range Issue #1: Deliver Justice Effectively, Efficiently, and Fairly	7
State Courts System Funding.....	7
Judicial Management Council	10
Performance and Accountability	13
Fairness and Diversity Awareness	16
Long-Range Issue #2: Enhance Access to Justice and Court Services	18
Access to Civil Justice	18
Court Interpreting Services	19
Court Access for People with Disabilities	21
Guardianship	23
Family Court	25
Problem-Solving Courts and Initiatives	29
Alternative Dispute Resolution.....	31
Long-Range Issue #3: Improve Understanding of the Judicial Process.....	35
Branch-Wide Court Communication Plan	35
Education and Outreach	37
Long-Range Issue #4: Modernize the Administration of Justice and Operation of Court Facilities	44
Court Technology	44
Emergency Preparedness.....	51
Long-Range Issue #5: Maintain a Professional, Ethical, and Skilled Judiciary and Workforce	54
Education for Judges, Quasi-Judicial Officers, and Court Personnel	54
Florida’s Court Structure	57
Court Administration	59
Court Committees	60
Map of Florida’s Court Jurisdictions	64
Judicial Certification Table	65
Florida’s Budget	66
State Courts System Appropriations.....	67
Filings, Florida’s Trial and Appellate Courts (2006 -07 to 2015 - 16)	68
District Court of Appeal Filings (2015 - 16) by Case Category	70
Trial Court Filings (2015 - 16) by Circuit and Division	70
Trial Court Filings (2015 - 16) by Circuit, County, & Division	73
Court Contacts for 2018	75

FLORIDA JUDICIAL BRANCH

Mission

The mission of the judicial branch is to protect rights and liberties,
uphold and interpret the law,
and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Vision

Justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable.

To be **accessible**, the Florida justice system will be convenient, understandable,
timely, and affordable to everyone.

To be **fair**, the Florida justice system will respect the dignity of every person,
regardless of race, class, gender or other characteristic, apply the law appropriately
to the circumstances of individual cases, and include judges and court staff who
reflect the community's diversity.

To be **effective**, the Florida justice system will uphold the law and apply rules and
procedures consistently and in a timely manner, resolve cases with finality, and
provide enforceable decisions.

To be **responsive**, the Florida justice system will anticipate and respond to the needs
of all members of society, and provide a variety of dispute resolution methods.

To be **accountable**, the Florida justice system will use public resources efficiently
and in a way that the public can understand.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

My all-time favorite movie is “To Kill A Mockingbird,” based on Harper Lee’s grand novel. I watch it every year. I’ve probably read the book 15 or 20 times.

Do you remember the part when Atticus Finch stands before the jury and makes closing arguments in the trial of Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman in a small Southern town in the first half of the 20th century? Atticus searches for the right words, the right message that might convince the all-white jury to do the right thing, to act honestly and justly. After a pause, he tells the jurors that if there is one thing in our system that is the great equalizer it is our courts.

Well, my brief summary hardly does justice to this deeply moving scene, which has inspired me and I’m sure many others—even though Atticus is unable to secure justice for his client. But I wanted to share it because of how powerfully it underscores the profound importance of a fair and impartial judiciary. Atticus’s dedication to justice and the terrible failure of the jurors to do their duty illustrate with utter clarity the importance of our courts.

Courts have a fundamental role in our democracy. I think sometimes we overlook the truth that courts are equally essential to a functioning economy and a civil society. And they are so very important to countless individuals. However, if courts are to carry out their essential roles they must have the trust and confidence of the people they serve.

That’s why annual reports like this one are so important.

Judges and many other employees work in this branch of government to make it possible for people to have a place to seek justice. But they would labor in vain if courts did not have a rock-solid foundation of public trust. As people learn more about their courts, this foundation is strengthened. And this annual report is just one way we in the courts try to reach out to the public to increase understanding about the judiciary.

This report is written for a wide audience—judges and court staff, certainly, but also all the people they serve. I assure you, if you take the time to read this report, you will better understand Florida courts and that greater understanding is critically important to the continuing functioning of the judiciary. As chief justice, I sincerely thank you for the time and attention you give to this report.

Let me give you a small preview of what you will find in the following pages. In this opening message, I will mention only a few highlights, topics that I hope will interest many people. I encourage you to browse through the entire report to discover the wide array of informative articles and graphics on court initiatives and programs in the fiscal year stretching from July 1, 2016, through June 30, 2017.

The first thing I’d like to draw to your attention: You can also learn more about Florida courts through social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Florida’s chief judges, trial court administrators and public information



officers have carefully and thoughtfully adopted these cutting-edge communication tools to reach out to the people who need courts and use courts. This has been an exciting development—in fact, Florida is a national leader in this area—and you can read more about it in this annual report.

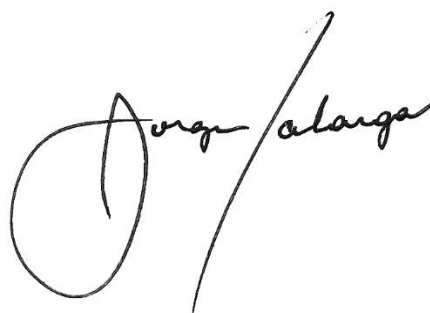
The use of social media by Florida courts didn't just happen. It was envisioned in a comprehensive communications plan the Supreme Court of Florida approved two years ago based on the research and recommendation of the Judicial Management Council. The JMC is a board of 15 judges, lawyers, and other public leaders that advises our judiciary. The JMC is charged with keeping on top of developing trends and potential crises so that Florida's courts can adjust as necessary and, regardless of any challenges, fulfill their mission to "protect rights and liberties, uphold and interpret the law, and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes."

In the 2016-17 fiscal year, the JMC devoted its attention to two important subjects—trial court security and guardianship improvements. I probably don't need to explain the importance of enhancing the security of our courtrooms, the very place thousands of people go to each day to seek justice. In guardianship cases, a court appoints someone to exercise certain legal rights of a person who has been judged unable to exercise those rights independently because of some incapacity. It's not just for elderly people—but there is no denying Florida's very large elderly population is fueling a growth in guardianship cases. And the recent increase in guardianship cases coming into Florida's courts is expected to climb even faster in the future. Please read more about both these issues in this report.

Also in this annual report, you can learn about the progress of the Commission on Access to Civil Justice, which is charged with finding ways to make sure more people have meaningful access to courts for important problems, such as issues dealing with families and housing to name just two examples. You can also read about the successful "problem-solving" courts, such as veterans courts and early childhood courts. Finally, you will find basic information about the structure of our court system, which consists of two levels of trial courts and two levels of appellate courts.

Before I close this message, I must express my deep respect for and gratitude to the people who work in Florida's courts, both on and off the bench. Together they helped Florida's trial and appellate courts bring more than 3.3 million cases to conclusion in the 12 months from July 2016 through June 2017.

Many of these cases were complex and challenging. Often they were painful to everyone involved. But, without exception, every single case was important to the person who brought it to court. Speaking for my fellow Justices and all the dedicated people who work in the Florida judiciary, I promise you we never forget that.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jorge A. Langa". The signature is stylized, with a large, loopy initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Jorge Labarga ***Chief Justice***

Justice Labarga was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in January 2009; he is the second Hispanic to sit on the court. He is the court's fifty-sixth chief justice of Florida and is currently serving his second term as chief justice.

Born in Havana, Cuba, Justice Labarga was a young boy when he ventured to Pahokee, Florida, with his family. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Florida in 1976, and, three years later, he earned his law degree, also from the University of Florida. He spent three years as an assistant public defender (from 1979 – 1982), five years as an assistant state attorney (from 1982 – 1987), and nine years in private practice, all in the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit. In 1996, he was appointed a circuit judge in the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, where he served in the family, civil, and criminal divisions and as the administrative judge of the civil division. Then in December 2008, he was appointed to the Fourth District Court of Appeal. However, Justice Labarga was on the appellate bench only one day before the governor selected him to serve on the Florida Supreme Court.

Justice Labarga and his wife Zulma have two children.



Barbara J. Pariente ***Justice***

Justice Pariente was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in December 1997. From 2004 – 2006, she was the chief justice, the second woman to serve in that role.

Born and raised in New York City, Justice Pariente received her BA from Boston University and her JD from George Washington University Law School. But Florida has been her home since 1973. After a two-year judicial clerkship in Fort Lauderdale, she spent 18 years in private practice in West Palm Beach, specializing in civil trial litigation. Then, in September 1993, she was appointed to the Fourth District Court of Appeal, where she served until her appointment to the Supreme Court.

During her years with the Supreme Court, she has actively supported programs that promote successful alternatives to incarceration, such as Florida's drug courts. She has also worked to improve methods for handling cases involving families and children in the courts; she promotes judicial education on the unified family court and advocates for improved case management, case coordination, and non-adversarial methods for resolving family disputes. Because of her longstanding commitment to children, Justice Pariente continues to be a mentor to students through Take Stock in Children.

Justice Pariente is married to retired Judge Frederick A. Hazouri, Fourth District Court of Appeal, and they have three married children and 10 grandchildren.



R. Fred Lewis ***Justice***

Justice Lewis was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in December 1998, and he served as chief justice from 2006 – 2008.

Born in Beckley, West Virginia, Justice Lewis made Florida his home in 1965, when he arrived to attend Florida Southern College in Lakeland. He then went to the University of Miami School of Law, and, after graduating, he attended the United States Army Adjutant General School. After his discharge from the military, he entered private practice in Miami, where he specialized in civil trial and appellate litigation until his appointment to the Florida Supreme Court.



While serving as chief justice, he founded Justice Teaching, an organization that pairs legal professionals with elementary, middle, and high schools in Florida to enhance civic and law-related education; currently, over 4,000 volunteer lawyers

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

and judges are placed with and active in Florida's public and private schools. He also convened the first inter-branch mental health summit, which developed and proposed a comprehensive plan to address the increasing needs of those with mental illnesses who are involved in the criminal justice system. In addition, he established a task force to develop a survey with which to audit all court facilities in the state with the goal of identifying and removing obstacles that inhibit access to justice for people with disabilities.

Justice Lewis and his wife Judith have two children, Elle and Lindsay.

Peggy A. Quince ***Justice***

Justice Quince was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in December 1998, and she served as chief justice from 2008 – 2010. She has the distinction of being the first African-American woman on the court.

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Justice Quince received her BS from Howard University and her JD from the Catholic University of America. She began her legal career in 1975 in Washington, DC, as a hearing officer with the Rental Accommodations Office administering the city's new rent control law. She entered private practice in Virginia in 1977, specializing in real estate and domestic relations, and then moved to Bradenton, Florida, in 1978 to open a law office, where she practiced general civil law until 1980. From there, she joined the Attorney General's Office, Criminal Division, serving for nearly 14 years. In 1994, she was appointed to the Second District Court of Appeal, where she remained until her appointment to the Supreme Court.

Justice Quince has been active in many civic and community organizations, including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Jack and Jill of America, the Urban League, the NAACP, and The Links, Inc. She has also received numerous awards, especially for her work on behalf of girls, women, minorities, civil rights issues, and various school programs.

Justice Quince has two daughters, Peggy LaVerne and Laura LaVerne.

Charles T. Canady ***Justice***

Justice Canady was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in August 2008, and he served as chief justice from 2010 – 2012.

Born in Lakeland, Florida, Justice Canady has the unusual distinction of having served in all three branches of government. Returning to Lakeland after receiving his BA from Haverford College and his JD from Yale Law School, he went into private practice, concentrating on real estate law. In 1984, he successfully ran for a seat in the Florida House and served for three terms. Then in 1993, he was elected to the US House, serving until 2001. Throughout his tenure in Congress, he was a member of the House Judiciary Committee, which sparked his interest in appellate work; he chaired the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution from 1995 to 2001. After leaving Washington, DC, he returned to Florida and settled in Tallahassee, where he served as the governor's general counsel. In 2002, the governor appointed him to the Second District Court of Appeal, where he remained until his appointment to the Florida Supreme Court.

Justice Canady and his wife, Jennifer Houghton, have two children.



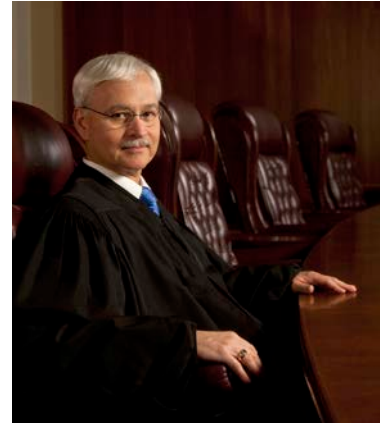
FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Ricky Polston

Justice

Justice Polston was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in October 2008, and he served as chief justice from 2012 – 2014.

A native of Graceville, Florida, Justice Polston grew up on a farm that raised peanuts, watermelon, and cattle. He began his professional life as a certified public accountant: he received his BS in accounting from Florida State University in 1977 and developed a thriving career (in fact, he is still a licensed CPA). Nine years later, he received his law degree, also from Florida State University. He then went into private practice, where he handled cases in state, federal, and appellate court. He remained in private practice until his appointment to the First District Court of Appeal in 2001, where he served until he was appointed to the Supreme Court.



Justice Polston and his wife, Deborah Ehler Polston, are the parents of ten children: in addition to their four biological children, they are raising a sibling group of six children whom they adopted from the state's foster care system.

C. Alan Lawson

Justice

Justice Lawson was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in December 2016.

A native of Lakeland, Florida, Justice Lawson received his AA from Tallahassee Community College, his BS from Clemson University, and his JD from Florida State University. After nine years in private practice and four years as an assistant county attorney for Orange County, Florida, he was appointed a circuit judge in the Ninth Judicial Circuit, where he served from 2002 – 2005. Then in 2006, he was appointed to the Fifth District Court of Appeal; his colleagues selected him to be the court's chief judge in 2015, and he served in that capacity until his appointment to the supreme court.



In addition to his volunteer work for various civic organizations, Justice Lawson has been involved in numerous bar and extrajudicial activities over the years: among them, he taught for the Florida Judicial College and served on the Florida DCA Budget Commission and the Florida Courts Technology Commission, and he was a member of the Florida Bar's Appellate Practice Section, the Rules of Criminal Procedure Committee, and the Code and Rules of Evidence Committee.

Justice Lawson and his wife, Julie Carlton Lawson, have two children.

[This link goes to information about the Florida Supreme Court justices.](#)

[For biosketches of all the supreme court justices, 1846 – present, take this link.](#)

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES



Justices of the Florida Supreme Court. Seated (l – r) are Justice Pariente, Chief Justice Labarga, and Justice Lewis; standing (l – r) are Justice Polston, Justice Quince, Justice Canady, and Justice Lawson.

July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017: The Year in Review

Justice is the court system's primary mission. But as Chief Justice Labarga frequently emphasizes, "It is not enough in today's world that courts merely achieve justice. We also must make sure that people see justice as it is being done. If justice is not *seen*, then people do not know that justice has been served."

For justice to be seen, courts must make information about themselves—about their operations, practices, and innovations—accessible and understandable to the people they serve. The *Florida State Courts Annual Report*, in conjunction with the [Short History of Florida State Courts Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#), is one of the many ways in which the branch seeks to share this kind of information with the public.

This section of the annual report is organized around the five long-range issues identified in the [Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch: 2016 – 2021](#). Long-range issues are defined as the high-priority areas that the branch, in seeking to fulfill its mission and stretch toward its vision, must address over the long term. The five long-range issues are as follows:

- *Deliver justice effectively, efficiently, and fairly;*
- *Enhance access to justice and court services;*
- *Improve understanding of the judicial process;*
- *Modernize the administration of justice and operation of court facilities;*
- *Maintain a professional, ethical, and skilled judiciary and workforce.*

With the long-range issues as its scaffolding, the annual report aims to increase public awareness about court programs, services, and performance and to educate the public about the purposes, roles, and responsibilities of the judicial branch (Goals 1.2 and 1.5 of [Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida](#)). In striving to deepen readers' knowledge and understanding of the third branch of government, this report aspires to foster people's trust and confidence in their courts.

Long-Range Issue #1:

Deliver Justice Effectively, Efficiently, and Fairly

Florida's people depend on their court system to make fair, reliable, and prompt case decisions. The administration of justice requires deliberate attention to each case, a well-defined process to minimize delay, and the appropriate use of limited resources. It is important that the Florida judicial branch continue to implement practices which utilize resources effectively, efficiently, and in an accountable manner while continuing its commitment to fairness and impartiality.

The Florida judicial branch is keenly aware of its responsibility to serve justice fairly and to govern itself effectively, efficiently, and accountably. These duties are especially weighty in this age of increasingly complex workloads and constrained resources—and in light of the growing need to provide additional assistance and services for self-represented litigants and other court users. To meet these responsibilities, branch leaders persist in their efforts to ensure the judiciary has sufficient and stable funding, and they continue to work steadfastly to strengthen the governance and policy development structures of the branch.

State Courts System Funding

Judges and court staff are committed to using their resources carefully, always looking for innovative ways to achieve greater efficiency and enhanced performance through technology and other time- and cost-saving measures. Even so, the need for adequate and reliable funding of Florida's courts is enduring.



When courts have outstanding, critical funding needs, judges, staff, and courtrooms are certainly affected—but so are the individuals, families, and businesses that depend on the courts to resolve disputes and achieve justice. For a lack of sufficient and stable funding for staff, buildings, technology, and other resources can lead to delays in the processing of cases that are important to the lives of individuals and to the livelihoods of businesses. Also at risk are the state’s aging trial courthouses, which are often beset by safety or security issues that can put people in harm’s way. In addition, a dearth of adequate resources can jeopardize opportunities to modernize and enhance court operations—opportunities that maximize taxpayers’ investment in their justice system.



Chief Justice Jorge Labarga discusses court funding issues with judicial branch leaders.

Suitable and dependable funding ensures that court users can have their needs met, expediently and safely, when they come through the courthouse doors, as hundreds of thousands do each year. Therefore, branch leaders encourage the state to invest in the people, places, and tools that are necessary to operate the courts system effectively and efficiently for the benefit of those the judiciary serves.

Historically, Florida’s courts have received less than one percent of the state’s total budget each year. For more information about the history of state courts system funding, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).

Funding for the 2016 – 17 Fiscal Year

In fiscal year 2016 – 17, from its \$82.2 billion budget, lawmakers appropriated \$521.7 million to the judicial branch. [Note: this figure includes \$20.4 million for pass through/legislative project funding (i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts’ core mission and not requested by the courts); \$19.2 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$2.8 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2016 – 17 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Over the last few years, the branch has faced challenges being in the same allocation of appropriations monies as agencies with high-profile exigencies (e.g., the Department of Corrections faces inmate safety issues and also has unmet maintenance and repair needs that have created security risks; and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement is endeavoring to work through a significant backlog of sexual assault kits and also needs additional investigators to examine use of force incidents by law enforcement officers and suspicious Department of Corrections prison deaths). Ultimately, lawmakers must decide what they consider the most pressing needs for allocation of limited funds.

That said, the legislature did not fund the judicial branch’s top budget priority: a pay issue for court staff and judges (specifically, the branch requested recurring funds for the second phase of a strategy to address recruitment, retention, and equity issues affecting court employees; the branch had also requested a positive salary increase for judges as part of a multi-year strategy to restore judicial salaries to a competitive level).

But the branch as a whole did have a number of successes in the 2016 session related to infrastructure projects for some of the district courts of appeal, such as critical and significant funding for the renovation project at the Third DCA and the construction of a new courthouse for the Fourth DCA. Furthermore, branch leaders received positive feedback on information supporting trial court requests, including the trial court technology strategic plan. (For more information about the technology plan, please see the [Short History](#)).

As mentioned above, the budget also included funding for several pass through/ legislative projects. For example, included in the trial court budget was funding for children's advocacy centers and for substance abuse treatment. In addition, the legislature provided funding for establishing problem-solving courts (drug courts, veterans treatment courts, and mental health courts) or expanding them.

But in the end, the trial courts sustained a total reduction of \$2.7 million, in part due to "historical reversions" (i.e., the branch, to ensure no breaks in trial court operations, tends to budget conservatively; thus, it typically does not spend all the funds it is allocated by the legislature. In this case, lawmakers reduced the branch's general revenue authority as a result). Costs, particularly in the areas of expert witnesses and court interpreting, are rising. The Trial Court Budget Commission is implementing practices to enhance monitoring of spending so that resources can be deployed to meet the greatest needs and can be maximized throughout the year.



Funding for the 2017 – 18 Fiscal Year

Leading up to the March 2017 legislative session, state economists, anticipating tightening revenues and projected shortfalls for the 2018 – 19 and 2019 – 20 fiscal years, urged lawmakers to adopt budget management strategies as they crafted the 2017 – 18 budget, with the goal of trying to minimize future shortfalls. In response, legislative appropriations panels developed proposals for budget cuts and advised the judicial branch and other state entities to consider potential budget reduction impacts as they crafted their legislative budget requests.

Within this context of anticipated budget constrictions, from its \$84.9 billion budget in fiscal year 2017 – 18, lawmakers appropriated \$513.8 million to the judicial branch. [Note: this figure includes \$20.2 million for pass through/legislative project funding (i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts); \$7.7 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$5.8 million for legislatively approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2017 – 18 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Even with record-breaking levels of tourism in Florida, state economists continue to warn of imminent revenue shortfalls (recovery costs for Hurricane Irma as well as increasing costs for human services—largely Medicaid—and for growth in K – 12 enrollment, for instance, are likely to exacerbate a budget gap). As lawmakers begin to consider the 2018 – 19 budget, which is being hammered out in the legislative session that began on January 9, 2018, economists emphasize that taking a proactive approach in the coming fiscal year will go a long way toward lessening future fiscal disruptions.

The branch's top priority was a pay increase for judges and court staff, and this budget funded a portion of that priority: specifically, effective October 1, 2017, the pay for justices and judges was increased by 10 percent. The other portion of that priority was a request for recurring funds for the second phase of a strategy to address recruitment, retention, and equity issues affecting court employees. Although this request was unsuccessful, the budget did provide an across-the-board pay raise for all eligible state employees (effective October 1, 2017, employees with a base rate of pay of \$40,000 or less received an annual increase of \$1,400, and employees with a base rate of pay greater than \$40,000 received an annual increase of \$1,000).

The budget also provided critical funding to complete the renovation project at the Third DCA. In addition, lawmakers funded a number of estimable projects that were not included in the courts system's legislative budget request. These projects included drug court funding (Seminole County); juvenile drug court funding (Eighteenth Circuit); veterans court funding (Collier, Lake, Leon, Marion, Miami-Dade, Nassau, and Seminole counties); courthouse emergency renovations repairs (Liberty County); various children's advocacy center-related initiatives; and funding for drugs used to treat the underlying addiction to opioids.

Despite extensive advocacy by the branch and its partners, however, funding was not approved for any of the issues requested by the trial courts and included in the judicial branch budget request (the trial courts sought funding for comprehensive technology improvements, including funding to develop and maintain case processing and management systems, to refresh and maintain court reporting equipment, and to provide a minimum level of infrastructure in counties around the state; they also requested funding for court interpreting services, court case management positions, and staff attorney positions). Furthermore, the budget reduced the salary appropriation of the trial courts by \$2 million, with no reduction in staff (in expectation that the courts could absorb the reduction through salary lapse generated when positions are not immediately filled, for instance); the budget also eliminated 39 unfunded trial court positions. To address the budget cut, the trial courts implemented a hiring freeze, which created a workload hardship. Finally, the legislature did not fund the 12 new judgeships certified by the supreme court—nor did it decertify the six judgeships that the court proposed for elimination. ([This link goes to the December 2016 supreme court opinion, *Certification of Need for Additional Judges*](#)).

Even with record-breaking levels of tourism in Florida, state economists continue to warn of imminent revenue shortfalls (recovery costs for Hurricane Irma as well as increasing costs for human services—largely Medicaid—and for growth in K – 12 enrollment, for instance, are likely to exacerbate a budget gap). As lawmakers begin to consider the 2018 – 19 budget, which is being hammered out in the legislative session that began on January 9, 2018, economists emphasize that taking a proactive approach in the coming fiscal year will go a long way toward lessening future fiscal disruptions.

[Take this link for more information about court funding and budget.](#)

Judicial Management Council

Since 1953, the judicial branch has relied on the guidance and recommendations of its judicial management councils (JMCs), which are considered high-level management consultants to the supreme court. The current council—the fifth iteration of the JMC, established in November 2012—was conceived as a “forward looking advisory body to deftly assist the chief justice and the supreme court in proactively identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and means to address them.” Its first chair, then Chief Justice Ricky Polston, called the JMC the “headlights of the branch, shining a high beam toward the future.” Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, who chairs the council now, refers to the JMC as “the workhorse of the judicial branch.” For more information about the work of the branch's five JMCs, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).

The current JMC was designed to be an agile body that can respond quickly and purposefully to challenges facing the branch. It achieves this dexterity through the creation of workgroups that are charged with specific tasks and are dissolved when their tasks have been accomplished. Of the workgroups established in the JMC's first term, three have already completed their charges. The Performance Workgroup reviewed filing and disposition trends by case type and level of work and made recommendations to the court about how to meet future branch needs for uniform and consistent data reporting and analysis in some crucial performance areas. The Education and Outreach Workgroup updated the branch-wide communication plan, [Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida](#), which was approved by the court and began to be implemented in January 2016. And the Long-Range Strategic Planning Workgroup revised the [Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch 2016 – 2021](#), which was approved by the court and began to be implemented in January 2016.

The Access to Justice Workgroup

The Access to Justice Workgroup continues to focus on the development and implementation of interactive, web-based “interviews” to facilitate self-represented litigants’ access to the courts. The software developed for this initiative, called the Do It Yourself (DIY) Florida Project, functions much like tax preparation software: it guides users through a series of questions, culminating in the production of a court document that can be reviewed, edited, and filed through the e-portal. At this point, landlord/tenant (evictions) interviews have been completed and reviewed by the workgroup, and a 90-day testing phase is currently underway. Once the testing phase is finished, the JMC anticipates these interviews will go “live” and be available for public use. The workgroup has also been focusing on small claims cases and some



Regarded as the “headlights of the branch,” the Judicial Management Council, which meets at least quarterly, consists of 15 voting members, including the chief justice (who chairs the council), an additional justice, representatives from each level of court, and public members.

simple dissolution of marriage matters: for small claims cases, interviews for each statement of claim have been developed and combined to create a single interview process that channels each user to the correct statement of claims; for dissolution of marriage cases, decision trees and questions (including answers and counter-petitions in these matters) have been developed for cases both with and without minor or dependent children. DIY Florida is just one of several “access to civil justice initiatives” supported by the supreme court. [\(To read about some of these other access initiatives, please see the *Short History*.\)](#)

During the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, Chief Justice Labarga created two new JMC workgroups: the Trial Court Security Workgroup and the Guardianship Workgroup.

The Trial Court Security Workgroup

Formed in August 2016, the Trial Court Security Workgroup, chaired by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, was created, in part, to address goal 4.1 of the long-range plan: “Protect all judges, court personnel, court users, and facilities through effective security, emergency preparedness, and continuity of operations plans.” (Note, in September 2015, the chief justice created a task force to address appellate court security issues; this link goes to the administrative order governing the [Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security](#).) The increasing incidences of mass violence and anti-government violence across the globe—and, in particular, the rise in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings—also spurred the formation of the Trial Court Security Workgroup. This workgroup is charged with evaluating security procedures, practices, and perceptions at Florida’s courthouses; reviewing national courthouse security procedures



Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, chairs the Judicial Management Council’s Trial Court Security Workgroup.

and consulting with professionals and experts on model practices; identifying important elements of security in trial court facilities; developing standards, model procedures, and recommendations for appropriate training; establishing criteria for a statewide reporting system for security incidents; and identifying effective partnerships and opportunities for partnerships in providing and promoting security in courthouses. ([This link goes to the press release announcing the creation of the Trial Court Security Workgroup.](#))

To advance its charges, the workgroup began by performing a broad review of security issues in Florida's trial courts: members examined current security practices, studied security trends in Florida and across the country, and identified some specific local challenges in providing trial court security. In addition, to assist in formulating recommendations to promote safety and security, the workgroup toured seven different courthouse facilities across the state. And to deepen their conversation and deliberations about court security, workgroup members brought in subject matter experts from the National Center for State Courts, various Florida sheriff's departments, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the US Department of Homeland Security, and county management. Finally, facilitated by the workgroup, the US Department of Homeland Security and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement partnered with local law enforcement and court personnel to conduct a critical infrastructure assessment survey of a county courthouse and offered to conduct additional security assessments in the coming months; these security assessment surveys will help identify security challenges and opportunities at the local courthouse level. The workgroup's final report, which will be submitted to the supreme court by June 30, 2018, will include recommendations designed to assist the judicial branch in further safeguarding its facilities and the people who work in and visit Florida's courthouses.

The Guardianship Workgroup

In guardianship cases, a court appoints someone to exercise certain legal rights of a person who, because of some incapacity, has been judged unable to exercise those rights independently. Although guardianship is not just for elderly people, Florida's burgeoning elderly population has significantly intensified the growth in guardianship cases. The Guardianship Workgroup, formed in October 2016, was established to try to address this potential crisis situation.

Chaired by Judge Olin Shinholser (ret.), Tenth Circuit, the workgroup has been tasked with examining judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianship to ensure that courts are most fittingly protecting the person, property, and rights of people who have been judged to be incapacitated and people who may have diminished capacity to function independently. It is also studying guardianship issues in the court system with the goal of improving accountability to better protect these vulnerable people. Other workgroup considerations include the use of least restrictive alternatives that address specific functional limitations; determinations of incapacity; restoration of capacity; the assessment and assignment of costs associated with guardianship administration; post adjudicatory proceedings and responsibilities related to guardianship, including the rights guaranteed by Florida law; and training opportunities available to judges and court staff. ([This link goes to the press release announcing the creation of the Guardianship Workgroup.](#))



Judge Olin Shinholser (ret.), Tenth Circuit, chairs the Judicial Management Council's Guardianship Workgroup.

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In preparation for meeting their charges, workgroup members began by reviewing the history of guardianship efforts in Florida and across the nation; participating in an exercise to ponder the significant events in the lifecycle of a guardianship case and to assess the way in which each event typically unfolds—and the way in which each should/could *ideally* unfold; considering the differences between the Uniform Adult Guardianship and Protective Proceedings Jurisdiction Act and Florida guardianship law; and studying literature on guardianship laws, procedures, and best practices across the country. Based on the above, the workgroup developed a recommendation concept list, which it continues to refine and will present to the supreme court in its final report. The final report will also reflect information derived from responses to a survey requesting feedback on the workgroup's recommendations for improvements; from two public hearings designed to glean community input regarding guardianship practices; and from the workgroup's collaboration with the newly formed [Florida WINGS initiative](#) (the Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders is a state court-community partnership developed by the National Guardianship Network to identify ways to advance guardianship reform). The report will be submitted to the court by October 2018.

Performance and Accountability

In the late 1990s, the branch's Judicial Management Council established the Committee on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability and the Committee on Trial Court Performance and Accountability to enhance the performance of Florida's courts and to ensure they use public resources efficiently and transparently. In response to the increasing workload demands on these committees, the supreme court separated them out from the Judicial Management Council in 2002, establishing each as a discrete commission.

The Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability (DCAP&A), currently chaired by Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A), currently chaired by Judge Diana Moreland, Twelfth Circuit, propose policies and procedures on matters related to the capable and effective functioning of Florida's courts through developing comprehensive resource management, performance measurement, and accountability programs. These commissions address several of the goals identified in the branch's long-range plan. In particular, they support branch efforts to "utilize caseload and other workload information to manage resources and promote accountability" (goal 1.3); to "ensure the fair and timely resolution of all cases through effective case management" (goal 1.2); and to "encourage the use of consistent practices, procedures, and forms statewide" (goal 1.5).



Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, chairs the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability.



Every two years via administrative order, the supreme court re-establishes each commission and directs it to work on particular issues and projects. (Please follow this link to read the [administrative order governing the current term of the DCAP&A](#). And this link goes to the [administrative order governing the current term of the TCP&A](#).) Below are the major initiatives on which these commissions, often in collaboration with other commissions or committees, focused during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year.

Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability

The DCAP&A concentrated on three projects in fiscal year 2016 – 17: it continued its efforts to improve timeframes for dependency and termination of parental rights appeals; it has been re-assessing staffing models for the positions under the appellate clerks of court; and it began working to identify and establish performance indicators for the development of an online dashboard that will convey data about appellate court performance to the public.

Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Appeals

Since 2011, the DCAP&A has been responsible for monitoring the timeliness of dependency and termination of parental rights appeals cases with the goal of minimizing the harm to children affected by these sensitive family proceedings. The commission found that while the district courts meet the overall goal of 165 days from Notice of Appeal to Disposition, they

were not consistently meeting the timeframes for document receipt (Notice of Appeal to Record, Record to Initial Brief, Initial Brief to Answer Brief, and Answer Brief to Reply Brief). To address this issue, in 2014, the supreme court directed the DCAP&A and the TCP&A to form a joint workgroup to determine the causes of the document delays in these cases and to recommend strategies to advance the receipt of documents at the appellate level.

In its report, the workgroup noted that several rules and court procedures are already in place to address delays—but they may be inadvertently overlooked in practice; other recommendations stressed efforts to enhance communication and provide notice in advance of these appeals. The workgroup submitted its recommendations to the supreme court, and in a February 2017 administrative order, the court adopted them, saying, “Implementation of these practices on the part of all stakeholders will greatly reduce the delays in these cases, for the benefit of the children involved.” [\(This link goes to the administrative order, *In Re: Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Appeals*.\)](#)

“Simple efforts on the part of all stakeholders, including judges, clerks, court reporters, trial court administration, and appellate counsel, would greatly reduce delays in dependency/termination of parental rights appeal cases,” Judge Salter and Judge Moreland wrote, stressing that “Each reduction in time on appeal is a direct benefit to the child in the time to permanency.”

In an effort to encourage the adoption of these policies by everyone involved in moving these cases forward, soon after the administrative order was released, Judges Salter and Moreland, the chairs of the two performance and accountability commissions, sent a joint letter to all the DCA and circuit chief judges, asking them to share the administrative order with the judges, clerks, and court administration in their courts. “Simple efforts on the part of all stakeholders, including judges, clerks, court reporters, trial court administration, and appellate counsel, would greatly reduce delays in dependency/TPR appeal cases,” they wrote, stressing that “Each reduction in time on appeal is a direct benefit to the child in the time to permanency.” The DCAP&A will continue to monitor the timeframes, gauging the extent to which the adoption of these practices mitigates the delays in document receipt.

Staffing Models for the Appellate Clerks of Court

The DCAP&A has been working with the appellate clerks of court to re-assess staffing models for positions in the appellate clerks’ offices (these positions include deputy clerks who handle a variety of discrete functions, such as processing incoming pleadings, docketing incoming briefs, preparing and entering orders and mandates, and managing files and records).

The last time the clerk staff model was reviewed was in 2012. At that time, a Joint Workgroup on Model Staffing Levels, comprising members of the DCAP&A and the DCA Budget Commission, was created to develop recommendations for allocating all district staff resources—i.e., central staff attorneys, law clerks, judicial assistants, marshal’s office personnel, and clerk’s office personnel. Since then, e-filing and other automated court processes have been implemented in the district courts—likely affecting the workload of clerk office positions. Thus the DCAP&A is in the process of revisiting the clerk staffing model to determine whether it needs to be modified to reflect changes wrought by the introduction of these technologies.

Performance Indicators for an Online Dashboard

Trial court and supreme court caseload data are readily available to the public (this link goes to [trial court statistics](#); this link goes to [supreme court caseload statistics](#)). To provide a complete picture of judicial branch performance, the DCAP&A is working to include caseload information about Florida’s DCAs in a similar fashion. Providing this information is a way to enhance public trust and confidence in the work of the district courts; thus, in collaboration with the Appellate Court Technology Committee, the commission has been working to identify and develop performance indicators for an online dashboard that will convey caseload information to the general public.

In other states, appellate courts, if they provide caseload information at all, tend to publish data within periodic written reports that focus on performance measures. The dashboard concept envisioned by commission members will reflect court performance directly on a public webpage, and the data will be updated quarterly or annually on an ongoing basis. DCAP&A staff are now working with OSCA's Office of Information Technology to move this concept forward. The commission anticipates housing this public dashboard on the Florida Courts website (www.flcourts.org).

Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability

While the DCAs have been state-funded for many years, the state did not assume responsibility for funding the trial courts until the July 2004 implementation of what is commonly referred to as Revision 7 (a voter-approved amendment to Article V, section 14, of the Florida Constitution). Before then, the trial courts were primarily county-funded, which caused disparities in the level of court services provided across the state. Revision 7 sought to alleviate these disparities, ensuring equitable distribution of resources to each circuit through the use of state funds. Since the successful implementation of Revision 7, the TCP&A has largely focused its efforts on establishing new, state-level performance and accountability policies for the trial courts, with the goal of providing better, more uniform services across all circuits.

During the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, in addition to its participation in the Joint Due Process Workgroup, the TCP&A worked on four major technology initiatives: the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System, the Trial Court Performance Management Framework, the Uniform Case Reporting Project, and Shared Remote Interpreting. Readers interested in learning about these technology projects can read about them in the [article on Court Technology below](#).



Judge Diane Moreland, Twelfth Circuit, chairs the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability.



Joint Due Process Workgroup

Due process means the conducting of legal proceedings in accordance with established rules and principles, designed to ensure that all people receive equal treatment under the law. Within the context of Florida's courts system, *due process elements* are the resources that directly protect the fundamental constitutional and legal rights of court litigants. Those resources are expert witnesses (who provide independent expert opinions concerning scientific or technical matters in dispute or concerning the physical, psychological, or mental condition of people in court matters involving fundamental rights); court interpreting (which eliminates barriers in the courts system for litigants with disabilities or limited ability to communicate in

English); and court reporting (which creates and preserves a record of words spoken in court and provides their timely and accurate transcription in the event an appeal is filed).

Because the provision of due process services involves both policy and fiscal considerations, the Joint Due Process Workgroup, established in 2015, comprises members both from the TCP&A and from the Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC). Co-chaired by TCBC member Judge John Stargel, Tenth Circuit, and TCP&A chair Judge Moreland, the workgroup is responsible for identifying factors affecting the cost of providing expert witness, court interpreting, and court reporting services in the trial courts and for developing recommendations to improve the provision of these services.

The workgroup was asked to begin by identifying funding and operational policy changes that could improve the provision of court-appointed expert witness services. Based on information gathered through a multi-faceted research approach, the workgroup submitted five types of recommended solutions (fiscal, operational, policy, statutory, and administrative) for process improvements and cost containment mechanisms for the appointment and payment of expert witnesses. In a February 2017 administrative order, the supreme court approved recommendations made in the workgroup's report, *Expert Witnesses in Florida's Trial Courts*, and included recommendations proposed in a 2014 TCP&A report called *Recommendations on the Provision of Court Appointed Expert Witnesses Services in Florida's Trial Courts*. Among the recommendations were proposals requiring circuits to adopt written policies governing the appointment and payment of expert witnesses, to select expert witnesses from a registry maintained by the circuit, and to appoint one

expert initially in standard competency proceedings. The workgroup also recommended the use of a uniform invoice for expert witness services; the development of a uniform contract for these services; the establishment of a statewide rate structure for the payment of certain expert witness fees; and the implementation of an educational component for judges and court staff. Most of the recommendations have already been implemented. ([See the administrative order adopting the workgroup's recommendations.](#))

Now working on court interpreting services, the workgroup analyzed current policies, practices, and rates in each circuit; evaluated the current Uniform Data Reporting information; and surveyed trial court administrators regarding existing resource allocations and cost containment measures. Based on the information it gathered, the workgroup identified two key issues that affect the provision of interpreting services in the trial courts: the scope of the types of proceedings in which an interpreter is provided and the difficulty in hiring and retaining certified staff interpreters. The workgroup is now researching the first issue and exploring solutions for the second.

Fairness and Diversity Awareness

Florida's judicial branch strives to demonstrate fairness and unbiased justice. This commitment is inherent in the branch's vision statement, which says, "To be fair, the Florida justice system will respect the dignity of every person, regardless of race, class, gender or other characteristic, apply the law appropriately to the circumstances of individual cases, and include judges and court staff who reflect the community's diversity." And the branch also emphasizes this commitment in its long-range plan: the first high-priority area of the strategic plan is to "Deliver justice effectively, efficiently, and fairly," and the first articulated goal is to "Perform judicial duties and administer justice without bias or prejudice." With the help of numerous supreme court-appointed committees over the last three decades, the branch has endeavored to realize these objectives, working mindfully to create court settings that are free of preconceptions and to shape environments in which judges, court personnel, attorneys, and litigants treat each other with courtesy, dignity, and consideration. (For information about the history of fairness and diversity initiatives in Florida's courts system, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)



Judge Peter Estrada, Tenth Circuit, chairs the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity.

Currently pioneering the courts system's fairness initiatives is the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity, which was established in 2004 to "advance the State Courts System's efforts to eliminate from court operations bias that is based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, financial status, or any characteristic that is without legal relevance." The committee is re-authorized every two years via administrative order, which identifies the particular subjects and projects that members are enjoined to address. Chaired by Judge Peter F. Estrada, Tenth Circuit, the 17-member body—which comprises judges, attorneys, a trial court clerk, and representatives from The Florida Bar, law enforcement, Florida universities, and the office of equal opportunity—enjoyed a highly productive year. ([This link goes to the administrative order governing the committee's 2016 – 18 term.](#))

For its current term, the committee has three tasks: to continue exploring funding opportunities for fairness and diversity education programs; to build upon earlier outreach efforts to advance fairness and diversity initiatives in the Florida justice system; and to continue its education campaign for judges and court staff. To identify resources to underwrite fairness and diversity education programs for judges and court staff, the committee has been working with the Florida Court Education Council, the Florida Conference for Circuit Judges, and OSCA. And to promote fairness and diversity initiatives among justice system partners, the committee continues to coordinate and collaborate with The Florida Bar, local bar associations, community organizations, Florida law schools, and other stakeholders: during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, for instance, committee members gave presentations at the Nova Southeastern University Shepard Broad College of Law, the University of Florida Levin College of Law, and the 2017 annual Clerks of Court Conference; committee members also participated in various minority mentoring and local bar events in Hillsborough and Miami-Dade counties. (For information about upcoming diversity events, please see the online [Fairness and Diversity Calendar](#).)

To support its education campaign, the committee has been working with the Florida Court Education Council to make recommendations about fairness and diversity trainings for judges and court personnel; it conducted trainings for new judges at the Sixth Circuit and for mediators at the annual Florida Dispute Resolution Center Conference; it continued to develop resources for judges and court staff on implicit bias and how to build awareness of it; and it reviewed the results of the 2015 survey on women in the legal profession, administered by The Florida Bar's Young Lawyers Division, and is preparing recommendations to the supreme court about ways to combat gender bias in the justice system. In addition, the committee contracted with a vendor to develop a train-the-trainer program on sentencing bias in the courts. The committee's goal is to prepare a pool of judges and court personnel to offer local trainings about sentencing bias from the bench; committee members also gave presentations about this issue at various community forums.



Gathered for a photo at a diversity event facilitated by the Hillsborough County Bar Association are (l – r) Judge Peter Estrada, Tenth Circuit (chair of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity); Ms Michelle Seabrooks (OSCA Human Resource Officer); Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit (vice chair of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity); Ms Brittany Maxey-Fisher (chair of The Florida Bar Diversity and Inclusion Committee); Ms Patricia Dawson (member of The Florida Bar Diversity and Inclusion Committee); and Mr. Anthony Holloway (chief of police, St. Petersburg Police Department, and member of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity).

Finally, members of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity agreed that, for strategic planning purposes, their work should be undergirded by a vision statement (an aspirational statement of a desired or preferred future) and a mission statement (a broad statement of purpose that articulates why an entity exists). After much discussion, members developed these statements: the vision of the standing committee is “a state court system free from bias and discriminatory practices,” and its mission is “to eliminate bias in the States Courts System by developing strategies and identifying resources to advance this effort.” (Take this link to the [Fairness and Diversity page](#) of the flcourts website.)



Members of the Eleventh Circuit's Fairness and Diversity Team line up for a photo. Fourth from the right is Judge Scott Bernstein, who chaired the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity from 2008 – 2016 and continues to serve as a member.

Long-Range Issue #2: Enhance Access to Justice and Court Services

Florida's courts are committed to equal access to justice for all. However, litigation costs, communication barriers, lack of information, complexity, biases, and physical obstructions can create difficulties for those seeking to access the courts to obtain relief. The judicial branch must strive to identify and remove real or perceived barriers to better provide meaningful access to the courts.

Public access to the courts is a cornerstone of the justice system. This axiom inheres in the *Constitution of the State of Florida* (Article I, section 21), which declares, “The courts shall be open to every person for redress of any injury, and justice shall be administered without sale, denial or delay.” The judicial branch recognizes, however, that litigants seeking access to the courts may face obstacles—economic barriers, cultural or attitudinal hurdles, language or communication obstructions, or physical or electronic impediments, for instance.

The judiciary is actively committed to identifying and reducing these obstacles. Through its endeavors to improve access to civil justice, to promote the use of innovative problem-solving courts and alternative dispute resolution processes, and to respond efficiently and effectively to the legal needs and best interests of Florida's most vulnerable populations (e.g., children, elder adults, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and people in need of decision-making assistance), the branch aspires to ensure that everyone who enters the courts, whether literally or virtually, has meaningful access to justice and court services.

Access to Civil Justice

In November 2014, citing the challenges faced by disadvantaged, low-income, and moderate-income Floridians when seeking meaningful and informed access to the civil justice system, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga signed an administrative order establishing the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice. ([This link goes to the administrative order creating the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.](#)) Bringing together the three branches of government, The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Foundation, civil legal aid providers, the business community, and other well-known stakeholders, the commission has embarked upon a coordinated effort to identify and remove economic and other barriers to civil justice. ([This link goes to the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice website.](#))

Since its launch, the commission has developed several promising projects for connecting disadvantaged, low-income, and moderate-income Floridians with legal resources:

The concept of a statewide online gateway portal:

Based on variables such as type of case, user's location, user's preference, and other factors, this web-based gateway portal would recommend the best existing civil legal resources for users (e.g., hotlines, law libraries, legal aid organizations, and court self-help centers). The Florida Legal Access Gateway was piloted in Clay County between



Members of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice, chaired by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, at their December 2017 meeting in Tallahassee.

October 20, 2016, and June 30, 2017; an evaluation report was prepared for submission to commission members for review and recommendation.

The use of emeritus attorneys: The commission recommended amendments to the *Rules Regulating The Florida Bar* to permit retired judges and retired and active law professors to serve as emeritus attorneys. The proposed rule changes were reviewed and approved by the appropriate Florida Bar committees and were adopted by the supreme court in November 2017; in its opinion, the court explained that these amendments “are intended to increase the pool of lawyers authorized to provide pro bono legal services to the community under the supervision of a legal aid organization.” ([To read the supreme court opinion, follow this link.](#))

The Cy Pres proposal: From the French, *cy pres comme possible*, meaning *as near as possible*, cy pres is a doctrine that permits a court to award to a non-profit organization (e.g., a legal aid program) any allocated, unclaimed, or undeliverable funds from a class action settlement or judgment. The supreme court referred this recommendation to The Florida Bar Civil Procedure Rules Committee to evaluate the most appropriate way to enact this proposal; the committee determined that statutory enactment would be the most appropriate course.

The Do It Yourself (DIY) Florida project: Coordinated under the direction of the Judicial Management Council, the DIY Florida project comprises the development and implementation of interactive, web-based “interviews” to facilitate self-represented litigants’ access to the courts. Users are guided through a series of questions that culminate in the production of court documents that are suitable for filing either through the statewide electronic filing portal or in person at the local clerk’s office. Thus far, landlord/tenant (evictions) interviews have been completed and reviewed, and a 90-day testing phase is underway. Also being developed are interviews for small claims cases and some simple dissolution of marriage matters.



For its 2016 – 18 term, the commission has been directed to consider “Florida’s legal assistance delivery system as a whole, including but not limited to staffed legal aid programs, resources and support for self-represented litigants, limited scope representation, pro bono services, innovative technology solutions, and other models and potential innovations.” The commission established three committees—the Executive Committee, the Services Options Committee, and the Resource Evaluation Committee—to carry out this work. ([For the administrative order governing the commission’s current term, follow this link.](#))

In addition, last June, Chief Justice Labarga created the Council of Business Partners, a five-member body that is working closely with the Executive Committee to cultivate a collaborative relationship between the corporate community and the civil legal services community. In the press release announcing the establishment of this council, he emphasized that “Employers, too, have a stake in [access to civil justice]. Employees who have challenges accessing justice have higher absenteeism and reduced productivity. It is in all our interests to address access to justice.” ([This link goes to the press release.](#))

Court Interpreting Services

Of the 20.6 million people who reside in Florida, approximately 3.9 million are foreign born. Moreover, roughly 28.1 percent of Sunshine State dwellers speak a language other than English at home, with 11.7 percent of them speaking English “less than very well” (data taken from the [2015 American Community Survey](#), conducted by the US Census Bureau). In developing the long-range plan, branch leaders, affirming that language hurdles can limit access to the courts and court services, emphasized the importance of “reduc[ing] communication and language barriers to facilitate participation in court proceedings” (goal 2.5 of the long-range plan).



Judge Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit, chairs the Court Interpreter Certification Board.

To minimize language barriers, the supreme court's Court Interpreter Certification Board, currently chaired by Judge Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit, continues its efforts to establish a pool of well-qualified court interpreters (court interpreters are trained to help people with limited English proficiency achieve equal footing with those who speak English). The board also remains focused on providing judges and trial court administrators with the means to evaluate the credentials of spoken language interpreters seeking appointment. To learn about the history of branch endeavors to develop a comprehensive court interpreting program, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).

The [Florida Rules for Certification and Regulation of Spoken Language Court Interpreters](#) (referred to as the Court Interpreter Rules) establishes three official state-level designations for spoken language interpreters: a certified court interpreter has achieved the highest level of expertise; a language skilled interpreter has reached the same level of proficiency—but in a language for which no certification exam is available; and a provisionally approved interpreter has passed the oral performance exam (at a lesser qualifying prescribed level) and satisfied the other general prerequisites but is not yet certified in a spoken language for which a state-certifying exam is available. As of October 2017, Florida's courts system has 330 certified interpreters, two language skilled interpreters, and 32 provisionally approved interpreters. In addition, 123 individuals poised to become certified, language skilled, or provisionally approved court interpreters have registered with the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA).

Depending on the location of the court interpreter user, interpreting services are now available in the following languages: Arabic, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, French, German, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Turkish, and Ukrainian. As remote interpreting becomes more generally available in Florida's courts, circuits will more readily be able to share their interpreter resources, enabling the branch to significantly enhance the availability of interpreter services while using state resources wisely. (Information about shared remote interpreting in Florida courts can be found in the [article below on Court Technology](#).)

To become a court interpreter, applicants are required to satisfy a series of stringent requirements, the first of which is to participate in a two-day orientation program administered by OSCA or a training provider approved by the Certification Board (the orientation workshop is a prerequisite for sitting for the written and oral performance examinations). Conducted in English and open to all prospective foreign language and sign language interpreters, these highly interactive workshops immerse attendees in a comprehensive introduction to the courts and the justice environment and give them a chance to build and practice their interpreting



Judge Ellen Masters, Tenth Circuit, talks about Guardianship in Florida at a 2017 continuing interpreter education event facilitated by the Tenth Circuit. Altogether, 65 interpreters participated in the workshop; most live in the Tenth Circuit, but others journeyed from the Tampa Bay area, Naples, Ft. Meyers, Daytona, and Ocala—and even from Jacksonville, Miami, and the Keys.



The job of a court interpreter is to place a non-English speaker on an equal footing with those who understand English. Here, that point is being made by trainer Melinda Gonzalez-Hibner, a Spanish language court interpreter, to prospective court interpreters participating in an intensive, two-day orientation workshop in Tallahassee in October 2016.

skills. OSCA facilitates at least three orientation programs each year, held across the state, and they are always well-attended: during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the three workshops drew 339 participants. During the same period, 148 candidates took the written exam, and 133 took the oral performance exam. In the last few years, in advance of the orientation workshops, several circuits, including the Seventh, Ninth, and Nineteenth, have offered local recruitment sessions that aim to introduce people to the profession and encourage them to attend an orientation; in addition, the Fifth and Ninth Circuits have been working with the University of Central Florida's Translation and Interpretation Certificate Program in an effort to encourage students to consider a career in court interpreting and to obtain formal training.

Every two years, Florida's court interpreters are required to earn a minimum of 16 continuing interpreter education credits. Since 2010, when that requirement was instituted, the Certification Board has approved more than 200 court interpreter education programs. While most of the programs have been offered by private entities, a number of circuits have begun to develop free, face-to-face training opportunities for their own interpreters and those in nearby circuits. Thus far, nine circuits have received approval for locally-devised programs (the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Circuits). Collectively, since 2011, they have offered 36 education programs—on a wide variety of topics. Recently, the Fifth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Circuits have all treated court interpreters to some cost-free, home-grown training opportunities. [\(To learn more about Florida's court interpreting program, please follow this link.\)](#)

Court Access for People with Disabilities

According to the most [recent US census data](#), nearly one in five people in the country report having one or more disabilities, with more than half of them disclosing that the disability is severe. Moreover, since the nation's population is aging, and since the risk of having impairments grows with age, the number of people with disabilities is likely to increase in the years ahead. This prognostication is of special significance in Florida, the state with the highest rate of residents who are 65 years old or more. To better provide meaningful access to Florida's courts, the judicial branch continues its efforts to ensure that court employees with disabilities are provided with reasonable accommodations when necessary and that court visitors with disabilities can effectively participate in court proceedings, programs, and services.

Court Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

The branch has had a longstanding commitment to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), established to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities available to those without disabilities. Enacted in 1990, the law protects people who have impairments that substantially limit major life activities—functions like breathing, seeing, hearing, speaking, understanding, learning, walking, caring for themselves, performing manual tasks, and working. Since the ADA became law, each of Florida's 20 circuits and five



In 2017, Chief Judge Elizabeth A. Metzger, Nineteenth Circuit (second from right), visited the Seventeenth Circuit to learn about its animal therapy program. Here (l – r), she is pictured with Ms Jessie Clifford (Humane Society of the Treasure Coast); Ms Valerie Hoffman (Nineteenth Circuit); Ms Melinda Steinbacher with her therapy dog, Emma (Canine Assisted Therapy); Judge Jose Izquierdo, Seventeenth Circuit; and Chief Judge Jack Tuter, Seventeenth Circuit.

district courts has had at least one ADA coordinator to facilitate compliance with the ADA at the local level. In addition to staying informed about new ADA regulations and their implications, the coordinators are knowledgeable about ADA issues associated with matters like facility accessibility, purchasing, contracts, technology, and electronic accessibility. The branch also has a statewide ADA coordinator who is responsible for researching statutes and regulations, facilitating training, advising on policy matters, and providing technical assistance to judicial officers and court employees regarding court compliance with the ADA. (This link goes to additional [information about branch efforts to ensure the accessibility of court services, programs, and activities.](#))

Minimizing the Effects of Architectural Barriers

The branch continues its efforts to minimize the effects of physical barriers to Florida's courts. Galvanizing these efforts was a branch-wide court accessibility initiative, launched by then Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis in 2006, which sought to eliminate architectural hurdles that hinder access for people with disabilities. With the ongoing strengthening of the economy and more resources available for addressing courthouses' ADA-related concerns, local and state lawmakers are earmarking funding for making needed improvements to existing structures and for replacing dilapidated ones. During fiscal year 2016 – 17, for instance, construction was completed on new courthouses in Broward and Washington counties, and state lawmakers provided funding for a new Fourth DCA courthouse; constructed in compliance with the *2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design*, these buildings are more readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities than their predecessors.

Therapy Animals in the Courts

A service animal is defined under the ADA as a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform particular tasks for an individual with a disability; the work or tasks the dog has been trained to perform are directly related to that person's disability. People with disabilities must generally be allowed to bring their service animals into all areas of the court facility where members of the public are normally allowed to go. In addition to the requirements for service dogs, the ADA regulations have a separate provision about miniature horses that have been trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities, and the courts must modify their policies to permit miniature horses where reasonable.

Under the ADA, emotional support, comfort, and companion animals are not considered service animals. Even so, in certain court situations, dogs other than service animals may be beneficial to people with disabilities, and a judge may consider allowing the use of such animals.

Under the applicable Florida law, a facility dog is defined as one that has been trained, evaluated, and certified according to industry standards and provides unobtrusive emotional support to children or adults in facility settings. Similarly, a therapy animal is defined as one that has been trained, evaluated, and certified according to industry standards by an organization that certifies animals as appropriate to provide animal therapy. The role of therapy animals in the courtroom has been recognized in Florida law since 2011, when legislation was passed authorizing the use of therapy animals in certain cases involving a sexual offense under certain circumstances. Then in 2014, legislators expanded the law to include the use of therapy dogs in cases involving sexual abuse victims who were under 16 at the time the crime occurred and in cases involving anyone with intellectual disabilities. Most recently, in the 2017 legislative session,



At a recent meeting in Tallahassee, Florida's trial court administrators learned about the benefits conferred by therapy animals in dependency and family court cases involving abuse or neglect. Above (l – r) are Ms Heather Gainey with her therapy dog, Brody (Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program); Ms Susan Wilson (Second Circuit); Mr. Chuck Mitchell (volunteer with the hospital's animal therapy program); and Ms Stephanie Perkins with her therapy dog, Margo (Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program).

they expanded the law further to statutorily authorize courthouse therapy dogs and, for the first time, facility dogs, to work with child victims in dependency and family court cases involving abuse or neglect; Florida law now formally authorizes the use of therapy animals in any proceeding that involves child abuse, abandonment, or neglect throughout the state. After consideration of all relevant factors, the court has the authority to decide whether to “permit a victim or witness under the age of 18, a person who has an intellectual disability, or a sexual offense victim or witness to testify with the assistance of a therapy animal or a facility dog.”

This express authorization in Florida law recognizes that children, people with intellectual disabilities, and people who are victims or witnesses in sexual offense cases have been traumatized and may be experiencing profound distress; these emotional and other barriers may hinder their access to justice. Therapy animals or facility dogs may offer support and be a soothing presence to these populations, helping them provide statements or give testimony that might otherwise be difficult or impossible for them to offer. Many Florida courts—among them, the Second, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Twentieth circuits—have instituted animal therapy or facility dog programs.

As the head of Florida’s courts system, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga has made improving court access a priority of his term (for instance, see [article on Access to Civil Justice above](#), and see [article on Guardianship Initiatives below](#)). In keeping with this priority, he seeks to reduce the obstacles that prevent full inclusion of all Floridians in the state courts system.



Therapy dog Brody, with the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program, patiently poses for a photo.

Guardianship

Florida has been a retirement haven since the 1960s. Thus it is no surprise that the nation’s third most populous state is also home to the highest rate of residents aged 65 years and older. Currently, nearly 3.5 million Floridians, approximately 17 percent of the state’s inhabitants, are at least 65 years old. Meanwhile, like the population of the US, the population of Florida is aging at an unprecedented rate, so that number is expected to rise: in 2030, more than 24 percent of the state’s denizens are likely to have already celebrated their sixty-fifth birthday ([Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research](#)).

Because the risk of developing one or more disabilities grows with age, accompanying the burgeoning of the state’s older population is the increasing number of guardianship cases in Florida’s courts. In fact, guardianship—a process in which a court appoints someone to exercise certain legal rights of a person who, because of some incapacity, has been judged unable to exercise those rights independently—is one of the few case types in the state that has shown growth over the last five years. (Note: even though older Floridians constitute the majority of guardianship cases, they represent only one demographic for whom a guardian may be appointed. Indeed, adults of any age may become incapacitated and require the appointment of a guardian on a temporary or permanent basis.)

Perceiving the escalation in guardianship cases as a potential crisis situation, the judicial branch has become involved in two significant efforts to improve the guardianship process.



Chief Judge Frederick J. Lauten, Ninth Circuit, chairs the Florida WINGS Stakeholders Group.

First is the supreme court's Guardianship Workgroup. Established in October 2016 under the umbrella of the supreme court's Judicial Management Council, this workgroup, chaired by Judge Olin Shinholser (ret.), Tenth Circuit, has been examining judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianship to ensure that courts are best protecting the person, property, and rights of people who have been judged to be incapacitated and people who may have diminished capacity to function independently. The workgroup is also developing strategies for improving accountability to better protect these vulnerable people. (For more information about this workgroup, please see the [article on the Judicial Management Council above](#).)

And second, the supreme court is spearheading a wide-reaching court-community partnership designed to improve practices in adult guardianship and to provide less restrictive decision-making options. Stakeholders have long agreed that Florida law and guardianship processes must periodically be assessed and improved, and numerous efforts had been made to promote guardianship reform in the state. However, each entity has worked largely independently of the others, targeting policy and practice issues from its own unique perspective and advancing solutions that address its own particular concerns. Lacking in Florida was a concerted effort to address the issues systematically among all the stakeholders. To ameliorate the ways that courts and guardians practice, and to enhance the lives of people who have, or may need, guardians, judicial branch leaders recognized the need for a broad-based, interdisciplinary, collaborative initiative. With a one-year grant and technical assistance from the American Bar Association and the National Center for State Courts, the judicial branch established a Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) in Florida. ([This link goes to more information about Guardianship WINGS Court-Stakeholder Projects.](#))

To initiate the process, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga called together a large, inclusive stakeholder group that is scheduled to meet four times during the grant period. At the first summit, which took place in July 2017, more than 40 guardianship stakeholders from across the state gathered to share their particular perspectives and to identify key issues that need to be addressed (invited stakeholders included members of the judiciary, of legislative and executive branch agencies, and of related, private organizations, as well as guardians and self-advocates). Stakeholders identified four areas on which they believe this initiative must focus: Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation; Alternatives to Guardianship; Process Improvement and Standardization; and Education and Awareness. At the second summit, in October, stakeholders laid the groundwork for developing a strategic plan for guardianship reform in Florida; they also discussed issues and efforts on which they can work collaboratively in the geographic region they represent.

To inform the strategic planning process, WINGS has begun seeking feedback from people whose lives are touched, or may be touched, by guardianship: people who are under guardianship (either currently or formerly) or who need decision-making assistance, families of such people, guardians, private and government attorneys, state agencies, and judges and court personnel. To get responses from the broadest spectrum possible, WINGS has taken a three-pronged approach: an online survey instrument, two public hearings (one in South Florida and one in Central Florida), and an online comment form. The goal of this outreach endeavor is to gather information about, and identify areas of need



Among the speakers at Florida's first WINGS Summit were Judge Jose Rodriguez, Ninth Circuit; State Courts Administrator PK Jameson; and Judge Michelle Morley, Fifth Circuit.



and concern regarding, the current state of guardianship, the public perception of guardianship, and other ways of providing decision-making assistance in Florida. (More information about this initiative is available on the [Florida WINGS webpage](#).)

In addition, to collect, cull, and process the torrent of data, information, and ideas (both from Florida and across the nation) that the stakeholder group will elicit, and to shape the strategic plan that will guide the state's guardianship reform efforts, the chief justice appointed a small steering committee (comprising a judge, a guardian, and representatives from a range of government agencies and non-profit organizations reflecting the diversity of issues associated with guardianship). Once crystallized, the strategic plan will denote specific goals and strategies for improving processes in and increasing the effectiveness of Florida's guardianship systems.

Family Court

Some of the most complex, unsettling, and private family matters—separation and divorce, child support, termination of parental rights, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, family violence, child neglect and abuse, substance abuse, mental illness—end up being adjudicated in the courts. Since introducing its first family court initiative in 1991, the judicial branch has been working closely with its community, state, and federal partners to develop comprehensive, integrated approaches to handling these sensitive cases—with the goal of achieving the best possible outcomes for children and families.

Family Court Initiatives

Many of the branch's innovative family court programs and practices are spearheaded by the supreme court's Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (FCC), established in 1994. Every two years, this steering committee is re-authorized by administrative order, which directs it to work on specific issues and projects. Currently chaired by Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, and comprising judges, quasi-judicial officers, and justice system partners, the FCC provides guidance and support to courts around the state, helping to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of family court operations. (Please follow this link to read the [administrative order governing the 2016 – 18 term of the FCC](#).) Also lending support to the branch's family court goals is OSCA's Office of Court Improvement (OCI); in addition to staffing the steering committee, the OCI develops and coordinates a wide range of family court trainings, publications, and other endeavors. (Take this link for [more information about OSCA's Office of Court Improvement](#).) Through implementing the innovations developed by the FCC and the OCI, the judicial branch works to resolve family court-related cases in a fair, timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

During the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the FCC remained focused on monitoring and expanding its School-Justice Partnership initiative, designed to ensure that children involved in family court cases stay in school and are not subject to suspension, expulsion, or arrest at higher rates than their peers. To achieve this goal, this initiative, launched in 2012, encourages courts around the state to work with local school boards to implement and maintain partnerships with school districts, state agencies, service providers, and law enforcement. Currently Alachua, Broward, Citrus, Leon, Okaloosa, Orange, Palm Beach, Pinellas, and Sarasota counties have school-justice partnerships in place; the FCC, in conjunction with the OCI and partnering agencies, continues to provide training and technical assistance to support local jurisdictions as they develop and implement this initiative. Currently, FCC members are addressing four key issues affecting school-justice partnerships in Florida: expansion, truancy, Baker Act, and transitions. (Take this link to the [School-Justice Partnerships website](#).)



At a recent meeting of the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court, the committee chair, Judge Christine Greider, Collier County (on right), smiles for a photo with Justice Barbara Pariente and Justice Alan Lawson.

In addition, the FCC continues providing training and technical assistance to help judicial circuits overcome some of the challenges they face in fully implementing the One Family/One Judge Model (under this model, efforts are made to identify all cases involving one family and bring them before one judge, unless impractical). The FCC has also been studying the handling of criminal domestic violence cases in the judicial circuits with the goal of developing recommendations for model practices to help ensure the safety of the victims, eliminate conflicting orders between court divisions, and provide clear, statewide standards.

Finally, since the 2015 release of their [*Family Court Tool Kit on Trauma and Child Development*](#), the FCC and the OCI, as part of their promotion action plan, recently finalized a three-hour, interactive training curriculum that can easily be delivered in multidisciplinary group settings. The curriculum for *Moving Toward a Trauma Responsive Family Court*—which includes workshop materials, a script for the judge-facilitator, links to relevant videos, and information about planning the workshop—focuses on the impact of trauma and toxic stress on the developing brain, overall health, and well-being; trauma-responsive practices to implement; and self-care strategies. Circuits have already begun to conduct this workshop for their court personnel and dependency court stakeholders. Additionally, FCC members have been collaborating with judicial education judges and staff to infuse trauma-responsive court practices into the various judicial education colleges and programs throughout the state.

Meanwhile, OCI staff have been overseeing the development of a new dependency problem-solving court model called a permanency docket, which focuses on “long stayers in care” (children who have been in out-of-home care for 18 months or longer). With support from the National Center for State Courts and Casey Family Programs (a national foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care), the OCI conceptualized the piloting of permanency dockets in Broward and Palm Beach counties. Each circuit appointed a multidisciplinary team to develop the pilot, and after identifying the sub-populations on which to focus and drafting core components based on other problem-solving court models, the teams introduced their permanency dockets in 2017. The OCI believes that taking a differentiated case management approach to this targeted dependency court population will reduce the amount of time it takes for a child to receive permanent placement.

Dependency Court Improvement Panel

Another big responsibility of the FCC is to assist the branch’s statewide, multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel, established in 2009 by then Chief Justice Peggy A. Quince to improve courtroom practices and decision-making in dependency cases. Currently chaired by Judge Hope Bristol, Seventeenth



Judge Alice Blackwell, Ninth Circuit, and other members of the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court listen to a legislative update from the “Charge Three Subcommittee,” which is responsible for examining existing court rules, pertinent statutes, and legislative proposals that impact the model family court concept to determine whether changes are necessary to enhance the operation of family courts.



Judge Hope T. Bristol, Seventeenth Circuit, chairs the statewide Dependency Court Improvement Panel.

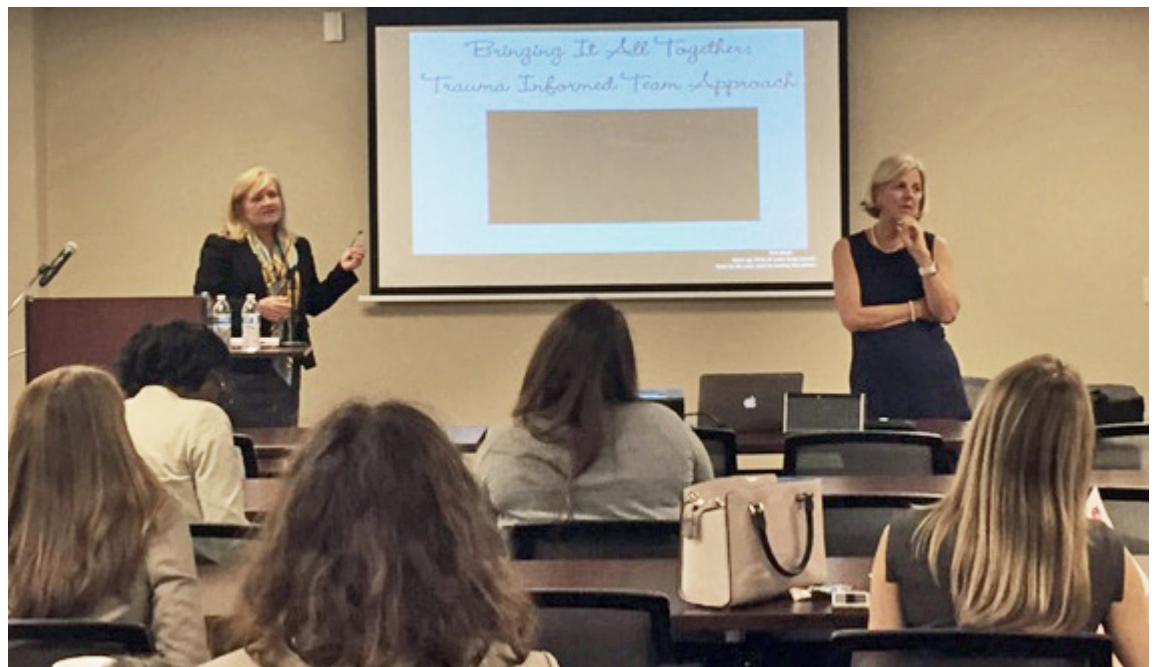
Circuit, the panel focused on two major projects during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year: the Early Childhood Court initiative and the court-related findings of the recent, federal Child and Family Services Review.

Early Childhood Court (ECC) is a specialized problem-solving docket that utilizes differentiated case management to focus on the unique needs of children ages zero to three who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected; its goal is to improve child safety and well-being, heal trauma and repair the parent-child relationship, expedite permanency, and stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse/neglect/violence. The dependency panel, with the support of the OCI and in coordination with Florida State University Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy, launched the ECC initiative in 2015; financed with a grant from Zero to Three: Quality Improvement Center for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams, the initiative provides the state's ECCs with training, technical assistance, judicial coaching with national judicial experts, support for sustainability, and enhancement of data collection and data analysis. At the heart of this initiative are the ECC Teams: comprising judges, case workers, attorneys, infant mental health clinicians, and parent and community organizations, these teams work to identify and expand evidence-based services for, and to prevent the further traumatization of, young children. In just three years, the ECC initiative has grown from three sites to 19. Recently, the ECC initiative garnered statewide attention when it was distinguished with a 2017 Prudential Productivity Award (these awards, conferred by Florida Taxwatch, recognize state government employees and work units for their development of cost-effective initiatives that increase productivity and promote innovation, thereby improving the delivery of state services and saving money for Florida's taxpayers and businesses).



During the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the Dependency Court Improvement Panel oversaw the development of the *Early Childhood Court Best Practice Standards* and coordinated an ECC All-Sites meeting that drew 175 participants from across the state. Looking ahead, the panel will focus on fidelity to the standards and long-term sustainability strategies so that the ECC's transformative approach to addressing the needs of infants, toddlers, and families will become ingrained in the courts system and accessible to all who need it.

In addition, the panel has been addressing the findings of the 2016 Child and Family Services Review, a federal audit conducted in all 50 states that assessed performance on a variety of outcomes and systemic factors related to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care. This was Florida's third such review (the first was in 2001; the second, in 2008). As a result of this review, Florida's Department of Children and Families is required to develop a program improvement plan to address



The Second Circuit facilitated a Trauma Responsive Courts Workshop in October 2017. Pictured here (l – r) are Administrative Magistrate Amanda Wall and Dr. Mimi Graham, director of Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, who talked about adverse childhood experiences and how to identify and define trauma.

each outcome and systemic factor determined not to be in substantial conformity. The dependency panel has been partnering with the department on court-related improvement efforts that will lead to better outcomes for Florida's children and families in dependency court. —Much is at stake for Florida's foster children, for federal funding for foster care is directly linked to compliance with federal guidelines; failure to complete the quality improvement plan and achieve negotiated levels of improvement could result in financial penalties amounting to a loss of millions of dollars.

Interpersonal Violence Resources

The family court jurisdiction also includes civil domestic violence (intimate partner violence injunctions, partner rape), repeat violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual violence (acquaintance and stranger rape). The judicial branch develops education and training resources aimed at enhancing its response to issues related to these case types.



The OCI established the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence (FIIV) in 2014 to support statewide consistency and uniformity in the handling of domestic violence cases, and soon thereafter, the FIIV began offering regional training programs. FIIV Phase I, launched in September 2014, focuses on domestic violence dynamics, the effects of domestic violence on children, elder abuse, and other civil protective injunctions (dating violence, sexual violence, repeat violence, and stalking). Altogether, 11 Phase I trainings have been offered so far, all across the state, and more than 170 judges have participated; an additional Phase I training is scheduled for early 2018. FIIV Phase II, which was first offered in December 2016, addresses rarer matters that may arise during domestic violence injunctions (e.g., firearms issues; mental health matters; violations and contempt; post judgment motions; judicial stress and vicarious trauma; supervised visitation; time-sharing; and alimony, child support, and economic relief for victims). Phase II has been offered four times so far, reaching 74 judges, and a fifth training is scheduled for early in 2018. Feedback about Phase II has been very enthusiastic: calling the training “comprehensive and useful,” and grateful for having “ample opportunities to share ideas and practices and to ask questions,” judges say that this “well-thought-out program” has helped them to “be more aware of reactions to trauma” and to “be more patient and more mindful” when handling cases involving domestic violence. In addition to the Phase I and Phase II trainings, the FIIV is facilitating a training on Evidence and Electronic Stalking, which will be offered in spring 2018.



Presenters and participants at the April 2017 Phase II Regional Domestic Violence Training in Tallahassee come together for a group photo.

These face-to-face education programs are supplemented with a variety of web-based trainings, particularly webinars, videos, and training modules. Each year, the OCI offers two webinars on domestic violence, for instance; during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, webinar topics were *Domestic Violence and the US Military* and the *Use of Facility Dogs in Judicial Proceedings*. In addition, a new training video was released: *The Effects of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Babies and Children*, produced by the Eleventh Circuit, teaches that, even if they never directly witness the actual violence, children and babies are affected and hurt if they live in a home in which a parent is being abused. (This link goes to the [FIIV library of webinars and videos](#).) In addition, the OCI updated two virtual court online trainings—*Domestic Violence Virtual Court Training* and *Domestic Violence Case Management Training*—to make them accessible for mobile device users. Now, the OCI is working on a training video about how to distinguish among the five different types of injunctions available to petitioners in Florida, scheduled for release in spring 2018.

Finally, the OCI continues to expand its repertoire of interpersonal violence publications: it produced the *2017 Sexual Violence Benchbook*, updated its *Domestic Violence Benchbook*, and produced two editions of the *Sexual Violence Newsletter*. (All FIIV publications are available from this link.) And it continues to build the FIIV webpage, aiming to make it the “go-to” place for judges and stakeholders seeking information about and resources on interpersonal violence. (Take this link to access [all FIIV resources](#).)

Problem-Solving Courts and Initiatives

Problem-solving courts—a concept that includes court types like drug court and veterans court—have shown great promise in helping people who have underlying treatment and other needs that are not being addressed, or cannot adequately be addressed, in traditional dockets. They aim to “address the root causes of justice system involvement through specialized dockets, multidisciplinary teams, and a non-adversarial approach,” and their core elements include the use of evidence-based treatment services designed to identify and meet the unique needs of each participant; judicial authority and supervision; and graduated, individualized, and coordinated responses (both for incentives and sanctions) to promote both public safety and the participant’s success. (This link goes to [background information about problem-solving courts in Florida](#).)



Gathering together for a group photo during National Drug Court Month in May 2017 are Judge Reginald Whitehead, Ninth Circuit (center, in light green shirt), who presides over drug court, along with members of the drug court staff.

Ultimately, problem-solving courts have also been shown to have positive personal results for the participants—and for those whose lives they touch. Of the more than 6,500 people admitted to drug court in 2016, for instance, nearly 4,000 graduated (note: because drug court is a 12- to 18-month program, not all admittees would have completed the program in 2016). During that year, 220 children of family dependency drug court participants were reunited with their parents; in addition, pregnant women who were participating in a drug court program gave birth to 102 drug-free babies. (Read [2016 data about drug court.](#))

The first problem-solving court was established in 1989, when Judge Herbert Klein, Miami-Dade County, launched the nation's, and the world's, first drug court. Since then, other kinds of problem-solving dockets have been implemented using the drug court model. The most prevalent problem-solving dockets in Florida are drug court, mental health court, veterans court, and early childhood court (the latter is discussed in the [Family Court article above](#)). Currently, in addition to 19 early childhood courts, Florida has 95 drug courts (47 adult felony drug courts, 7 adult misdemeanor drug courts, 22 juvenile drug courts, 15 family dependency drug courts, and four DUI drug courts). Florida also has 24 mental health courts and 30 veterans courts. (View a side-by-side comparison of the [core components of six different problem-solving courts.](#))

Many of Florida's problem-solving court initiatives have evolved under the guidance of the supreme court's Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts, established in 2010 (the task force represents a merger of two earlier supreme court committees). Chaired by Judge Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade County, and supported by OSCA's Office of Court Improvement, the 25-member task force includes judges and representatives from a wide range of justice system partners and community organizations. The task force is charged with addressing the needs and challenges of individuals with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders who become involved in the justice system. (Take this link to view the [administrative order governing the task force's 2016 – 18 term.](#))

The task force's most momentous accomplishment during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year was its release of the *Florida Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards*, approved by the supreme court in June 2017. Based largely on volumes I and II of the *Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards* published by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals—but modified in places to better suit the terminology and nuances common among adult drug courts in Florida—the standards are meant to clearly define the practices that Florida's adult drug courts should implement in order to adhere to evidence-based principles that have been scientifically shown to produce better outcomes (because research is an ongoing process, as new studies are completed, new standards may be added). The document addresses, among other



During the November 2017 meeting of the governor and cabinet, Judge T. Patt Maney, Okaloosa County, was awarded the Governor's Medal of Merit for his body of work with veterans in Florida (among other accomplishments, Judge Maney was responsible for the legislation that codified veterans court in Florida statute). Posing for this photo (l – r) are Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis, Governor Rick Scott, Judge T. Patt Maney, Attorney General Pam Bondi, Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam, and Representative Mel Ponder.

measures, standards for treatment; drug and alcohol testing; the multidisciplinary team; the roles and responsibilities of the judge; monitoring and evaluation; and target population. The supreme court is encouraging all adult drug courts to adopt the standards to conform to the national drug court model, thereby ensuring positive outcomes and cost savings. (This link goes to the [Florida Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards](#).)

Building on this milestone, the task force is now working to develop a certification program to give drug courts and other problem-solving courts a chance to demonstrate their adherence to the evidence-based best practice standards. The certification program will be voluntary, and, thus far, the task force has been developing organizational strategies and principles to serve as a framework for implementing the standards and the certification process.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Florida has long been hailed as a national leader in promoting and institutionalizing court-connected mediation; indeed, Florida's commitment to alternative dispute resolution (ADR) dates back to the mid-1970s. ADR had its beginnings in Dade County's first citizen dispute settlement center; established in 1975, it was the fruit of grassroots, community-driven efforts. Soon thereafter, the first county court mediation program was established in Broward County. In 1988, as a consequence of a study conducted by a Legislative Study Commission on Alternative Dispute Resolution, ADR was brought under the aegis of the Florida courts system. (To learn more about the history of ADR in Florida's courts, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

The ADR process that Florida's courts utilize most frequently is mediation: a way in which people who are having a dispute—with the help of a neutral and impartial guide called a mediator—can talk about their issues and design a solution to that dispute. Litigants who work with a mediator get to be their own decision-makers—rather than having to defer to a final decision by the court. In addition, litigants who utilize mediation and other ADR processes generally settle their cases more quickly and more cost-effectively than those who opt for judicial intervention; in short, mediation conserves the time and resources of the parties and of the courts. By supporting branch efforts to process cases effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner, ADR mechanisms play an important role in enhancing people's access to justice. (At this link, find answers to questions about [what mediation is and how it works](#).)

The statewide hub for ADR education, training, and research is the Florida Dispute Resolution Center (DRC), founded in 1986 as a joint effort of the supreme court and the Florida State University College of Law. Housed in the supreme court building, the DRC also provides staff assistance to [five supreme court mediation boards and committees](#), supports courts across the state in developing ADR programs, certifies mediators and mediation training programs in five areas (county, family, circuit, dependency, and appellate), and oversees the grievance procedure against mediators and parenting coordinators. At the end of December 2017, more than 5,600 certified mediators were serving Florida's citizens. (This link goes to [more information about mediation in Florida](#).)

In addition, several times a year, DRC staff publish a newsletter, [The Neutral](#), which contains ADR news



Justice Peggy A. Quince (center) was honored with the Florida Dispute Resolution Center's 2017 Sharon Press Excellence in Alternative Dispute Resolution Award, presented annually to a person for "visionary leadership, professional integrity, and unwavering devotion to the field of alternative dispute resolution." Here, Justice Quince is flanked by Ms Susan Marvin, chief of the Dispute Resolution Center (on right), and Ms Sharon Press, the center's former chief and currently the director of the Dispute Resolution Institute at Hamline University.

and updates, information about upcoming education programs, and news from the field. The DRC also produces, and regularly updates, the [ADR Resource Handbook](#) containing select ADR statutes, court rules, and administrative orders; recently, the 2018 edition was released (Collaborative Law Process and Parenting Coordinator Discipline Operating Procedures are among the new resources in the latest edition).

The DRC also spearheads the state's paramount ADR education event—the annual, statewide conference for ADR practitioners. Generally, approximately 1,000 conferees are drawn to these programs where, over the course of two days, they attend three plenary sessions and five workshop sessions (each session offers, on average, 14 choices). The conference gives ADR professionals opportunities to earn their required continuing mediation education credits (in



In November 2017 in Bartow, 19 students took part in a county mediation training: a free, four-day program that prepared them to serve as county court mediators (these are primarily volunteers who mediate small claims cases). Here, participants pose for a photo with their trainers.

ethics, cultural/diversity awareness, interpersonal violence education, and family, appellate, and general mediation issues), as well as occasions to network with other practitioners from around the state.

The 2017 annual conference was the DRC's twenty-fifth, and, over the years, these programs have continued to evolve, each having its own flavor and focus. The 2016 conference, *Dimensions of Diversity*, addressed some of the many forms of diversity about which mediators must be informed, e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and culture. And the 2017 program, *Passion, Purpose, and Peacemaking*, offered a four-hour pre-conference session on Exploring Mediator Ethics, enabling participants to earn all their ethics continuing mediator education credits in one place. In addition, in place of regular workshop sessions, participants could choose to register for a seven-hour Appellate Mediator Certification track or a four-hour Arbitration Training track. Justice Peggy Quince delivered the welcoming comments before both conferences, thanking attendees for supporting the judicial branch goal of making justice accessible to all: "The Florida court system is indebted to you ADR professionals for all that you have done over the years," she stated; noting that Florida's court system is "one of the busiest in the country," she stressed that "We would not have survived without your dedicated service."

In addition to offering this statewide education program each year, DRC staff regularly conduct free, four-day county mediation training programs that prepare participants to serve as county court mediators (these are primarily volunteers

Litigants who work with a mediator get to be their own decision-makers—rather than having to defer to a final decision by the court. In addition, litigants who utilize mediation and other alternative dispute resolution processes generally settle their cases more quickly and more cost-effectively than those who opt for judicial intervention; in short, mediation conserves the time and resources of the parties and of the courts. By supporting branch efforts to process cases effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms play an important role in enhancing people’s access to justice.

who mediate small claims cases). DRC staff introduce prospective mediators to the principles of conflict resolution, the mediation parties and participants, the components of a mediation, cultural and disability awareness, and ethics, among other topics. On the last day, attendees participate in a role play simulation that is immediately critiqued by DRC staff and other Florida Supreme Court certified mediators. In 2016 – 17, staff offered five of these training programs (in Bradenton, Brevard, Escambia, Duval, and Volusia counties), in which 69 people participated.

DRC staff also conduct advanced continuing mediation education trainings across the state; five were offered during fiscal year 2016 – 17 (in Panama City, Fort Lauderdale, Bunnell, Bradenton, and Fort Myers). Designed for volunteer mediators and staff mediators, these free, six-hour trainings—which focus largely on mediator ethics but often address diversity and interpersonal violence topics as well—help mediators stay up-to-date on these weighty topics and on their ethics education requirements. Altogether, 205 certified mediators participated in these trainings.

Some of the state’s youngest mediators also get to enjoy the DRC’s free training opportunities. Each year, elementary school students studying conflict resolution skills at the Florida State University School (a K – 12 charter school in Leon County) mark Mediation Week with a visit to the supreme court, where they participate in a variety of education sessions facilitated by DRC staff. In addition to being addressed by a justice, the fledgling mediators learn about the branches of government, the levels of court, and the five mediation certifications. The visit also includes a mock mediation staged by DRC staff, after which the students perform several mediation-focused skits before a highly enthusiastic audience (the skits generally have a fairy tale basis; the Three Little Pigs continues to be a favorite).

Also in the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the supreme court addressed several consequential ADR issues. In October 2016, it adopted proposed amendments to Part III, Mediation Certification Applications and Discipline, of the Florida Rules for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediators. Part III applies to all proceedings before investigatory committees and adjudicatory panels of the Mediator Qualifications and Discipline Review Board involving applications for certification or discipline of certified and court-appointed mediators. The



Each year, local school children who are studying conflict resolution skills in the Florida State University School, Second Circuit, commemorate Mediation Week with an educational visit to the supreme court. Several of the students participating in the 2017 program are clearly excited about taking notes on the “I Celebrated Mediation Day” notepads they received from the Dispute Resolution Center.



In addition to conducting county mediation trainings, Dispute Resolution Center staff regularly conduct continuing mediator education trainings across the state each year. These free, six-hour trainings, designed for volunteer mediators and staff mediators, focus largely on mediator ethics but often address diversity and interpersonal violence topics as well. Above are the trainers and participants of the 2017 program that was held at the Manatee County Judicial Center.

amendments to the rules were designed to close existing gaps, memorialize and clarify current procedures, and address situations for which no direction previously existed. (To read the [supreme court opinion](#), follow this link.)

Moreover, in an October 2016 administrative order, the supreme court established the Parenting Coordinator Disciplinary Review Board to perform investigations and adjudications of grievances against parenting coordinators. (In Florida, parenting coordination was established as a form of dispute resolution by statute in 2013, and in 2014, the supreme court adopted the Rules for Qualified and Court-Appointed Parenting Coordinators, which, among other things, provide that the DRC will implement the disciplinary process for those who violate these rules; the above administrative order was designed to help the DRC fulfill this directive.) In addition to creating the disciplinary review board, the administrative order outlines the board's policies and procedures and identifies its membership composition. (Take this link to view the [administrative order](#).) The board had its first annual meeting and training in March 2017.

Finally, after completing a continuing mediator education documentation study, the Supreme Court Committee on ADR Rules and Policy rescinded the requirement that the reporting of all education activities be accompanied by backup documentation for the hours claimed. Beginning with renewal applications due on February 1, 2017, the DRC returned to the practice of random audits in which a select group of renewal applicants, in advance of their renewal submission date, are notified that they need documentation. This elimination of backup documentation is another reflection of the DRC's goal of becoming as paper-free as possible—to streamline its processes, to save resources (both human and financial), and to be kind to the environment.

Long-Range Issue #3: Improve Understanding of the Judicial Process

The judicial branch's legal authority is a grant by the people, and public trust and confidence in the judicial branch is at the heart of maintaining a democratic society. Promoting public trust and confidence in the courts enhances the effectiveness of court actions, strengthens judicial impartiality, and improves the ability of courts to fulfill their mission. Improved communication, collaboration, and education efforts will better inform the public about the judicial branch's role, mission, and vision.

Studies have regularly revealed that when people have a greater knowledge and understanding of the American justice system and the role of the courts within it, their confidence in and support for their courts is heightened. With that in mind, through traditional as well as more contemporary communication methods, and through educational events and activities for “students” of all ages, the judicial branch endeavors to provide Floridians with a wealth of opportunities to learn about the roles, functions, responsibilities, and accomplishments of their courts. In working to meet the goals of the branch-wide communication plan, and in developing a bounty of education and outreach initiatives, Florida's courts seek to deliver timely, consistent, and useful information to all its key audiences: the public; court users; judicial branch partners and stakeholders; government entities; education, business, and civic organizations; the media; and, of course, judges and court personnel.

Branch-Wide Court Communication Plan

In 2015, while the Judicial Management Council was revising the branch's long-range plan, it was simultaneously considering strategies for advancing the communication-related goals that the plan was getting ready to announce. Shaped with input from judges, court public information officers and other court staff, and the press, the branch-wide communication plan, [*Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida 2016*](#), seeks to help the courts build relationships with a variety of partners, enhance public understanding of and support for the branch, speak clearly and purposefully about the branch, support open lines of communication, and communicate effectively using coordinated, strategic efforts. Implementation began in January 2016. (For more background about the communication plan, please see the [*Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives*](#).)



At the Florida Court Public Information Officers 2017 Annual Conference, after providing an Update on the Florida Courts Communication Plan: One Year Later, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga gathers for a photo with attendees.

Chief Justice Jorge Labarga charged the courts' designated public information officers (PIOs) with putting the plan into effect in their respective circuits/district courts of appeal, directing them to design strategies and activities that best respond to local needs and resources. PIOs agreed that their first undertakings should be to improve their outreach to the public and to develop effective public information programs. The *Year One Implementation* report, prepared by the Florida Supreme Court Public Information Office and released in May 2017, details the abundant successes that the courts have already achieved.

Recognizing that their websites are their primary communication tool, for instance, 18 of Florida's 20 circuits and all the District Courts of Appeal (DCAs) have been reviewing and revamping the organization and content of their websites with the goal of improving access to information for the public. The PIOs have also been working to fortify their relations with the media, educating court personnel and judges in the methods needed to work cooperatively and respectfully with reporters. PIOs have also supported the expansion of court outreach programs such as courthouse tours for schoolchildren, citizen forums, and public education programs. At the same time, they have been working to strengthen internal communications; for instance, they pointed to improvements made in crisis communications with judges and court staff in anticipation of, during, and in the aftermath of the hurricanes that struck Florida in 2017.

In addition, while Florida's courts naturally continue to debate the pros and cons of social media, given the strict ethical limits under which they operate, they now universally use Twitter to communicate during emergency situations and to promulgate high-profile case information: in fact, 18 circuits, all five DCAs, and the supreme court and OSCA are active on Twitter now. Further, the supreme court, OSCA, and several circuits are also active on Facebook, Instagram, and



Mr. Stephen Thompson, Florida court public information officer for the Sixth Circuit, gives a presentation on Managing the High Profile Trial: A Public Information Officer's Perspective at the 2017 conference.

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LinkedIn. And three courts—the Ninth Circuit, the Eleventh Circuit, and the supreme court—have begun producing podcasts to communicate with the public. (From this link, access [each Florida court's social media accounts](#); this link goes to the [Year One Implementation](#) report.)

The courts' burgeoning social media presence could not have been timelier. Indeed, in September 2017, social media played a crucial role in meeting the crises wrought by Hurricane Irma, the catastrophic storm that brought coastal surge flooding, flooding rainfall, and damaging wind from the northern Leeward Islands to the Southeast US, leaving major devastation to 64 of Florida's 67 counties in its wake. As Craig Waters, the supreme court's communications director, explained, "At the height of the storm, the state courts system had to perform a controlled shutdown of its entire statewide network. In many instances this meant that court websites, email accounts, online dockets, and IP phones no longer worked. Facebook and Twitter became the go-to means of communications for this period of time. Courts from the supreme court all the way down to the trial level courts as well as the Office of the State Courts Administrator relied on Facebook and Twitter to get the word out about what was happening as the storm hit Florida. This real-life result confirmed the key role for social media envisioned by the 2016 communications plan."

Education and Outreach

The judicial branch has developed an abundance of opportunities for the people of Florida to learn about their courts. Every circuit and appellate court in the state offers an array of programs and activities created to inform the public about the courts system—among them, courthouse tours, citizen guides, Justice Teaching and other school outreach efforts, teen courts, Law Day and Constitution Day activities, moot court competitions, Take Your Child to Work Days, juror appreciation events, "meet your judge" and "inside the courts" programs, adoption events, speakers bureaus, citizen advisory committees, and media outreach efforts. (This link goes to a compilation of [court-community relations activities](#) by circuit and District Court of Appeal). Through these activities, the judicial branch seeks to educate people from all walks of life about their courts system, to encourage vibrant court-community relationships, to enhance people's trust and confidence in their justice system—and to help foster a more engaged, informed, responsible citizenry generally.

The [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) provides more information about branch efforts to deepen public understanding of the third branch. This document also includes an extensive chronicle of branch endeavors to strengthen [trust and confidence in Florida's courts](#). In addition, the [Education and Outreach tab](#) on the Florida Courts website offers a host of resources for boosting viewers' knowledge of Florida's courts system. Described below are some of the other ways in which the branch strives to provide Floridians with positive, meaningful interactions with their courts.



The Ninth Circuit's annual Inside the Courts program, a free, four-night education and outreach initiative first launched in 1998, provides attendees with a behind-the-scenes look at the operations of the courts system and the workings of the judicial branch. Created by Orange County Judge W. Michael Miller, this program draws, on average, 120 people to each of its two-hour sessions.

Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums

Instituted in 1998, Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums are generally offered in the spring of election years for circuits in which a contested judicial election will be taking place. These 90-minute forums focus on the necessity for integrity and professionalism among candidates for judicial office, the impact of campaign conduct on public trust and confidence in the justice system, and the dire consequences of violating Canon 7 of the *Code of Judicial Conduct*, which governs political conduct by judges and judicial candidates. The forums are coordinated by the supreme court, the trial court chief judges, the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee, and the Board of Governors of The Florida Bar. (To learn more about the standards for ethical behavior governing judicial candidates, see [An Aid to Understanding Canon 7](#), prepared by the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee.) All judicial candidates are encouraged to attend, and the forums are also open to campaign managers and their staff, local political party chairs, presidents of local bar associations, the media, and the public.



In the Nineteenth Circuit, Judge Daryl Isenhower, St. Lucie County, developed a four-night program called Your Courts Up Close (based on the highly popular Inside the Courts initiative developed by the Ninth Circuit). The 2017 event drew more than 100 participants, who came to hear speakers address various topics related to the courts and the criminal justice system. Judge Isenhower, above, hosted the program, facilitating the various question-and-answer periods. The circuit seeks to make Your Courts Up Close an annual event.

Annual Reporters Workshop

Recognizing the importance of playing a proactive role in heightening reporters' understanding of the court system, the supreme court has hosted an Annual Reporters Workshop since 1989. Presented by The Florida Bar Media and Communications Law Committee and subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation, these two-day events are designed to teach the basics of legal reporting to reporters who are new to the legal/courts beat, providing them with a helpful introduction to covering justice system issues. The sessions—which are conducted by justices, judges, attorneys, professors, and veteran reporters—vary each year, but they generally focus on matters like effective techniques for reporting high-profile cases, merit retention in Florida, public records and how to obtain the ones you need, libel law and defamation, lawyer regulation, and journalism in the world of social media.

Justice Teaching Initiative

A law-related education program that aims to partner every elementary, middle, and high school in the state with a legal professional, the Justice Teaching Initiative was founded by then Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis in 2006 and is governed by a select committee appointed by Justice Lewis. Its goal is to promote students' understanding of Florida's justice system and laws, develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and teach them about the effective interaction of Florida's courts within the constitutional structure. Currently, more than 4,000 lawyers and judges serve as resources for Justice Teaching, and all the state's public schools and hundreds of its private schools now have Justice Teaching volunteers. Justice Teaching provides a partnership model, resource materials including lessons and activities, and interactive methodologies to bring the courts and the constitution to life for Florida's students. (More information is available on the [Justice Teaching website](#).)

Justice Teaching Institute

Initially conceived in response to a national study documenting the public's lack of, and need for, court-related information, the Justice Teaching Institute was first offered in 1997, when then Chief Justice Gerald Kogan instituted it as part of the Florida Supreme Court's Sesquicentennial Celebration. Since then, each year, up to 25 secondary school teachers from across the state are selected to participate in this comprehensive, five-day education initiative on the fundamentals of the judicial branch. The program is sponsored and hosted by the supreme court, funded by The Florida Bar Foundation, and coordinated by the Florida Law Related Education Association. (More information about the program can be found in the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

Taught primarily by the seven justices, two “mentor judges,” and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, the institute introduces the teachers to the structure and functions of the state courts system, the state versus the federal courts systems, the criminal court process, the Florida constitution, the case study method, legal research skills, and the constitutional issues underlying an actual case that is about to be argued before the court. The highlight of the program is the teachers’ own mock oral argument on the very case for which the justices themselves are preparing.

The Justice Teaching Institute is one of the courts system’s most promising initiatives to support teachers’ efforts to introduce their students to the vital role courts play in our society. (This link goes to the [Justice Teaching Institute webpage](#).)

Visiting the Supreme Court: Oral Arguments, Education Tours, and Education Programs

Visitors to the state capital can enjoy a variety of options for learning about the history and functions of Florida’s highest court and the fundamentals of Florida’s courts system. One of the most compelling ways to learn about the inner workings of the supreme court is to attend an oral argument—a “conversation” between the justices and attorneys, during which the attorneys clarify the legal reasons for their position and answer questions posed by the justices. Oral arguments are held August through June, typically scheduled during the first full week of each month, and are open to the public. (For more [information about oral argument and the oral argument schedule](#), follow this link.) Those who cannot attend oral arguments or who are interested in watching archived ones (the archives go back to 1997) can view them online, via WFSU’s [Gavel to Gavel](#). In addition, as of February 2018, all arguments before the state’s highest court are being shown on [Facebook Live](#). Information about high-profile supreme court cases, both current and archived, is also available on the [supreme court’s website](#) and on [Facebook live](#).

Visitors can also tour the public areas of the Florida Supreme Court Building. Groups of 10 or more who are interested in a guided tour experience can take the 45-minute Educational Program/Tour, which begins in the supreme court



The High School Moot Court Competition, a program of the Florida Law Related Education Association, offers students a unique opportunity to learn about the appellate process: students write and submit briefs for evaluation, and, if selected, they present oral arguments before an appellate judging panel using a fictitious constitutional case. Students who make it to the final round, such as those pictured here, present their oral arguments before the justices in the Florida Supreme Court Courtroom.



Justice R. Fred Lewis talks about the History of Search and Seizure under the Fourth Amendment with Justice Teaching Institute Fellows.

courtroom and teaches participants about the judicial branch, Florida's courts system, the differences between trial and appellate courts, and the role of the justices and how they are appointed and retained. Smaller groups, and those who prefer to furnish themselves with informational brochures and set off at their own pace, can take a self-guided tour.

Groups of young people (fifth graders through college students) can also be scheduled for the Mock Oral Argument Experience, a 75-minute education program that culminates in the enactment of an oral argument using a hypothetical case. These groups come to the supreme court from all across the state, especially during the 60-day legislative session. Most of the young people are on school trips, but the court has noted an increase in the number of youth leadership groups visiting lately; leadership groups recently hosted by the court include Florida 4-H, Girls State, Boys



One of the highlights of the annual Justice Teaching Institute at the supreme court is a mock oral argument on a case for which the justices themselves are preparing; here, Justice Teaching Institute fellows play the part of attorneys during the mock oral argument.



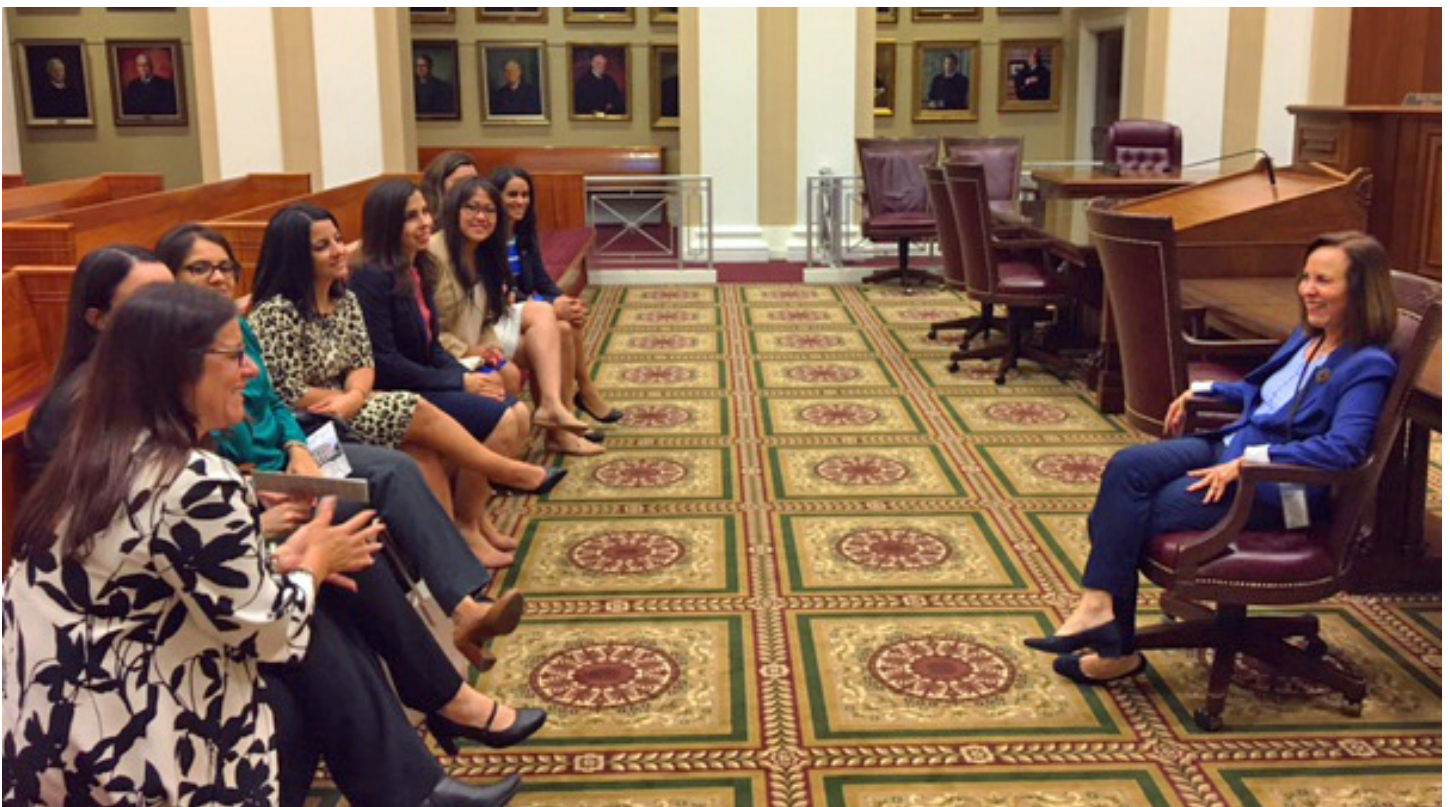
Oral argument is a "conversation" between the justices and attorneys, during which the attorneys clarify the legal reasons for their position and answer questions posed by the justices. Oral arguments are open to the public, and attending one, or viewing one online (via Gavel to Gavel or Facebook), is an excellent way to learn about the inner workings of the supreme court.

State, Florida Youth Leadership, Electric Co-op Youth Leadership, the Florida House/Page and Messengers Programs, Polk County Youth Leadership, and the PACE Center for Girls Youth Leadership. All in all, in the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, court staff led 148 Educational Programs/Tours and guided 68 student groups through the Mock Oral Argument Experience; between them, the two programs reached more than 7,500 participants. (This link goes to additional information about [tours and education programs at the supreme court.](#))



On Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, Justice Ricky Polston talks to the children of supreme court and OSCA employees about the structure and function of Florida's courts.

The supreme court is also a popular destination for adult leadership groups of various kinds. These groups take a guided tour of the public areas of the building, and they are welcomed by, and learn something new about the justice system



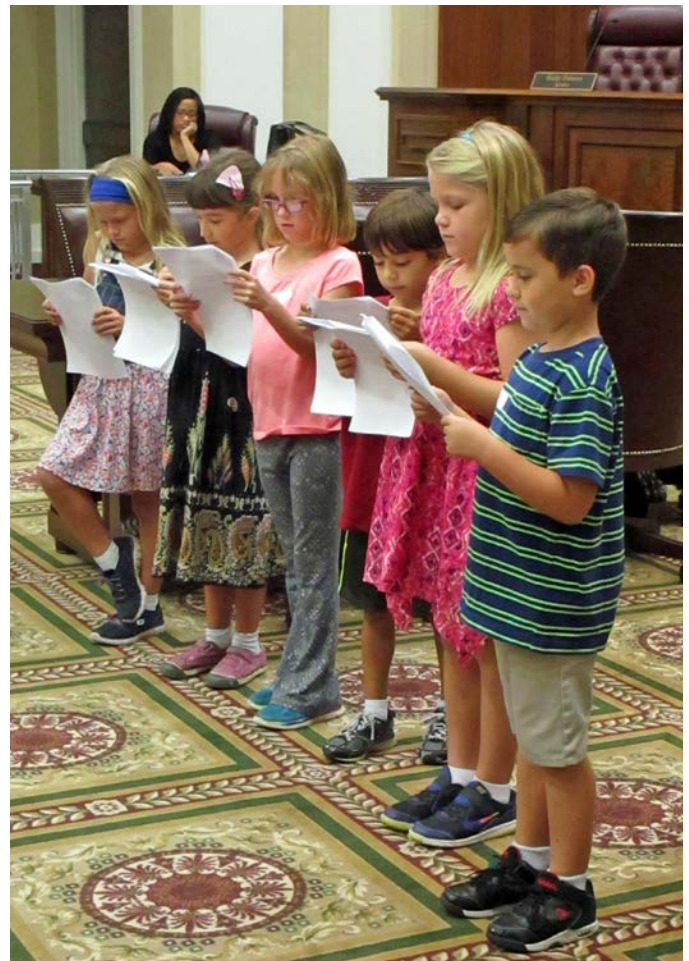
Justice Barbara J. Pariente meets with leaders from the Florida International University in the Florida Supreme Court Courtroom for a discussion about the judicial branch and about how to balance work/personal commitments.

from, one of the justices. Altogether, 252 adults visited with leadership groups during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year. These groups included Leadership Tallahassee, Leadership Pinellas, Leadership Tampa Bay, Leadership St. Pete, Northwest Regional Leadership, Polk County Leadership, and several Department of Children and Families leadership groups. (For more information about educational activities for visitors to the supreme court, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives.](#))

Florida Supreme Court Library and Archives

The Florida Supreme Court Library, founded in 1845, is the oldest of Florida's state-supported libraries. It was originally established for use by the supreme court and the attorneys who practice before it. Although that continues to be its primary purpose, it now serves the entire state courts system as well. Library staff also provide assistance to other law libraries, law firms, and state agencies, and the library is open to the public: people can do legal or historical research there, and school, family, and adult groups are invited to ponder the treasures in the rare book room and admire the archival wonders on display in the reading room. (This link goes to the [library webpage.](#))

The library is also home to the supreme court archives, which contain primary documents of Florida Supreme Court history related to the court and its justices. In the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the library archivist completed inventorying the papers of former Justice James Alderman (on the bench from 1978 – 85); the justice's speeches and his personal and administrative work papers are now available to researchers. In addition, when he retired, Justice James E.C. Perry (on the bench from 2009 – 16) donated 12 cubic feet (approximately eight boxes) of his professional correspondence, notebooks, and work papers to the library; the archivist has begun the process of cataloging these papers. To slow down the deterioration of the papers preserved in the archives, the archivist also oversaw the rehousing, into acid-free folders, of the



Acting out a mock conflict for their peers, chaperons, and court staff at the annual Mediation Day event at the supreme court, these young thespians take their roles very seriously.



The supreme court creates educational opportunities for students of all ages. Indeed, the court has become a popular destination for all sorts of adult leadership groups. This group is from St. Johns Episcopal Church in Tallahassee.

collections of Justices Ben Overton, Gerald Kogan, Major Harding, and Stephen Grimes and of the papers of the Racial and Ethnic Bias Study Commission (1989 – 91). Further, archives and library staff composed short biographies of every justice who has served on the bench, from 1946 to the present; these [biographies are now available online](#). Moreover, the archivist contributed historic court photos and historical information to the supreme court’s Public Information Office, which has been seeking to expand its outreach to the public with regular posts, on [Facebook](#) and other social media, on court topics of historical significance.

And, finally, in the supreme court rotunda, library staff prepared an exhibit of books and documents of the Bourbon Era of Florida history (1887 – 1902), a period during which former slave owners and wealthy elites from before the Civil War regained control of state and local government, created a new state constitution that institutionalized their power, and launched the economic development of the state that continues to this day. The display, which was one of the library’s *Evolution of Justice in Florida* exhibits, contained a number of original items that date back to this era. (The *Evolution of Justice in Florida* project, conceived in 2002 by then Chief Justice Harry Anstead and later sustained by then Chief Justice Barbara J. Pariente, was designed to “educate the public about the history of our state’s judiciary and to strengthen confidence in Florida’s Courts System.” This link goes to the [Evolution of Justice](#) booklet that grew out of the project.) (More information about the Florida Supreme Court Library can be found in the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)



Members of Leadership Tallahassee (a year-long program that prepares adult participants to take on community leadership roles) learn about the Florida Supreme Court Seal. The present seal—the one that is set into the floor directly beneath the court rotunda—was officially adopted in 1950. Like the court’s prior seals, the official motto is the Latin phrase, *Sat Cito Si Recte*—“Soon enough if done rightly”—indicating the importance of taking the time necessary to achieve true justice.

Court Publications

To familiarize people with the judicial branch and to enhance communication between the courts and other justice system entities, the legislature, and the executive branch, OSCA’s Innovations and Outreach Unit, under the direction of the supreme court, produces the [Florida State Courts Annual Report](#) each year. In addition, several times a year, the unit publishes the [Full Court Press](#), the official newsletter of the state courts system, which aims to share information about local and statewide court-based initiatives and programs, to promote communication among Florida’s state courts, and to serve as a kind of “meeting place” for all the members of the state courts family, both immediate and extended.

Long-Range Issue #4:**Modernize the Administration of Justice and Operation of Court Facilities**

The administration of a state court system serving millions of people each year is a complex undertaking. Managing the court system resources and personnel is further complicated by growing customer expectations, ever more complex legal issues and cases, and rapidly changing technology. The judicial branch's ability to assess its environment and respond appropriately will enhance the broad range of court services and technology solutions designed to meet the needs of court users.

People count on their courts system to be effective, efficient, and convenient; they expect that due process will be followed, that disputes will be resolved justly and in a timely manner, and that useful information will be available to them promptly and without undue expense. To meet these expectations, Florida's courts system—which disposed more than 3.4 million cases on average over each of the last five years—must steadily find ways to improve the processes it uses to accomplish its constitutional mission. Toward that end, the judicial branch continues to make advances in the use of technology to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness, and security of court processes. The security of judges, court personnel, and court users is also a fundamental concern, and the branch takes seriously its responsibility to keep the doors of the courthouse open while protecting the people inside the courts—as well as the court facilities themselves—from emergencies that could disrupt court operations and delay justice.

Court Technology

Technology has become indispensable to the daily operations of the courts, and Florida's judicial branch is increasingly deploying technology to facilitate the effective, efficient, fair, and timely resolution of cases. In recent years,

Florida's courts have made significant progress, for instance, in implementing electronic filing (e-filing); developing more sophisticated data collection, data management, and case management systems; enhancing technological communications to enable the sharing of limited resources (e.g., court interpreter services); improving services for the mobile environment; strengthening cybersecurity services; and automating court-related business processes. (Background about many of these endeavors can be found in the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)



Judge Lisa Taylor Munyon, Ninth Circuit, chairs the Florida Courts Technology Commission.

To advise the justices on matters relating to the use of technology in the judicial branch, the supreme court established the Florida Courts Technology Commission (originally called the Court Technology Users Committee) in 1995. Currently chaired by Judge Lisa Taylor Munyon, Ninth Circuit, this commission oversees, manages, and directs the development and use of technology within the branch; coordinates and reviews recommendations concerning court policy matters that involve the use of technology; and establishes the technology policies and standards by which all court committees and workgroups must abide. (For information about the recent work of the commission, please see its [2017 annual report](#).)

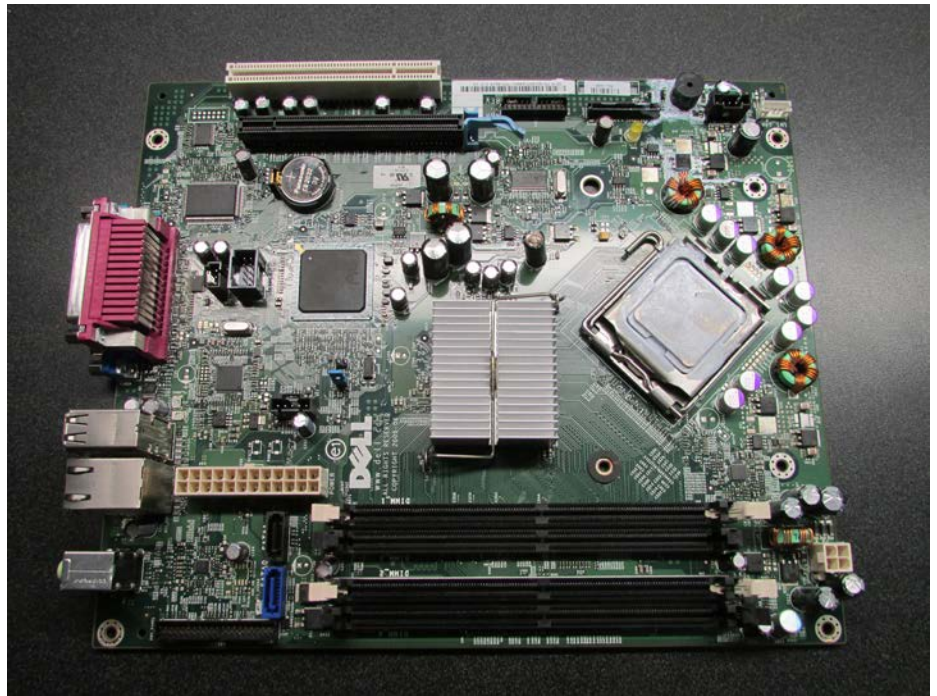
Below is information about some of the courts system's leading technology initiatives.

The Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan

While the branch continues to make great strides in developing and implementing technology solutions to support people's efficient and effective access to justice, it also faces some significant challenges. The paramount challenge is funding. Because funding for trial court technology falls under the jurisdiction of each of the 67 boards of county commissioners, technology resources differ from one county to another, resulting in inequities in the level of information

and the services that the trial courts can provide. To address these disparities, in 2015, the Trial Court Budget Commission released, and the supreme court adopted, the [Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan 2015 - 2019](#). Identifying the critical business capabilities and the corresponding technological capabilities that the trial courts must have in order to function effectively, this plan offers a comprehensive solution to address the funding challenges as well as the future technology needs of the trial courts.

In 2018, through the legislative process, the judicial branch will continue pursuing funding to support its comprehensive technology plan for the trial courts. Specifically, to supplement the local funding that the counties provide for technology, the branch is requesting



state funding, both non-recurring and recurring dollars. With a stable, statewide funding source, the branch would be positioned to allocate technology resources equitably, thereby ensuring that each of the 20 circuits has the basic, essential technology infrastructure in place to provide all Floridians with equal access to justice (this minimum level of technology services includes core function technology services and skilled staff needed to operate and maintain these systems). Also requested is funding for hardware and software to receive and manage case files electronically (the branch aims to build on its investment in the Court Application Processing System, or CAPS, which provides judges and court staff with electronic case file information and functionality needed to perform their adjudicatory function); funding for equipment and bandwidth to support branch efforts to expand its regional remote interpreting technology pilot, making remote court interpreting available statewide; and funding for refreshing and maintaining aging court reporting equipment (read more about CAPS and remote court interpreting below).

The Trial Court Performance Management Framework

Applying performance measures to gauge the effectiveness and efficiency of court practices is a longstanding concept: Florida's commitment to delivering fair and timely justice and to improving accountability to the public dates back to at least the 1990s, when the branch's Judicial Management Council established the courts system's first performance and accountability committees. These committees were charged with enhancing the performance of Florida's courts and ensuring that they use public resources efficiently and in a way that people could understand.

This commitment to justice that is fair, timely, and accountable is ongoing. In 2014, the supreme court directed the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A) to develop "recommendations on a performance management framework for the trial courts with an emphasis on articulating long-term objectives for better quantifying performance to identify potential problems and take corrective action in the effective use of court resources." Through the development of such a framework, the judicial branch would be able to utilize emerging data collection methods to improve the trial court system's capacity to measure its performance and to apply results for procedural refinements, thereby enhancing service delivery in trial court services and programs.

To carry out this supreme court directive, the TCP&A established the Performance Management Workgroup, and in June 2016, the workgroup submitted *Recommendations on a Performance Management Framework for Florida's Trial Courts: Phase One, Foundations for a Performance Management Framework* to the supreme court. To prepare this report, the workgroup envisioned what the branch would look like in 10 years and then worked backwards to try to determine what type of data collection system would be needed now to achieve that vision. The report describes the framework's goal and scope, its essential element principles and administrative principles, and its long-term objectives. The supreme

court approved the recommendations and charged the TCP&A with continuing its development of the performance management framework. The workgroup is now focused on setting baseline data and benchmarks for three critical measures: time to disposition, clearance rate, and age of active pending cases. It is also working on identifying additional measures for potential use at the state and local levels and on developing a process for correcting court data problems and errors.

With the advent of some of the technology initiatives delineated below (in particular, the components of the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System—the Court Application Processing Systems, the Judicial Data Management System, and the Uniform Case Reporting System), the judicial branch aspires to have the ability to integrate case management technology at the local levels along with data standardization efforts at the state-level, thereby allowing for the meaningful analysis of case processes and timeliness—and culminating in greater transparency, accountability, and cost effectiveness.

The Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System

The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A) has been given responsibility for spearheading technology-based strategies for moving cases more efficiently and effectively through the trial court process. In December 2012, the branch had a significant breakthrough when, after an intensive two-year collaboration, the TCP&A, together with its Court Statistics and Workload Committee and with the Florida Courts Technology Commission, released the [Trial Court Integrated Management Solution \(TIMS\) report](#), which provided a framework for a standardized, statewide, integrated data management solution for capturing and reporting case and court activity information for use both at the circuit and statewide levels. In short, this report defined the kind of data the courts should be collecting about the activity of the courts as well as the kind of system the branch would need to build in order to collect these data. The supreme court accepted the recommendations of the TIMS report in March 2013, and since then, the branch has been working on a series of small, self-contained projects that will eventually be “snapped together” to form an Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System. (For more about this system and about the TIMS report, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

The TCP&A has been monitoring the development of the two major components of the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System: the Court Application Processing System, a local case management system for judges and case managers; and the Judicial Data Management Services System, a data management strategy that provides state-level data management services to all elements of the court system. The TCP&A is also overseeing the evolution of the Uniform Case Reporting System: a sub-component of the Judicial Data Management Services System, this reporting system is designed to capture, from the clerks of court, specific case activity data, providing crucial workload information to all levels of court. These three projects are described below.



The Court Application Processing System (CAPS) allows trial judges and their staff to work electronically on cases across many devices and data sources—and in any location (in court, in chambers, and beyond). Using CAPS, judges and their staff can search, access, and work on electronic case files and related information in the course of managing cases, scheduling and conducting hearings, adjudicating disputed issues, and recording and reporting judicial activity. By enabling judges to view and search e-filed documents immediately, to produce and disseminate orders electronically (CAPS pre-populates key information), and to receive alerts when documents are ready for electronic signature, CAPS improves the courts system’s operational efficiency. CAPS also reduces the massive flow of case files that move back and forth among the judge, case manager, and clerk of court.

Because CAPS has the potential to serve as the foundation for a fully automated trial court case management system, statewide implementation is essential. Substantial progress has already been made: during the branch’s [2013 – 15 Foreclosure Initiative](#), many circuits purchased CAPS to support judicial efforts to resolve the backlog of foreclosure cases (CAPS were purchased with a portion of the national foreclosure settlement funds that lawmakers earmarked for court technology enhancements during the crisis). As of January 2018, 61 of Florida’s 67 counties have deployed CAPS in either the civil or criminal division or in both divisions.

The Judicial Data Management Services System (JDMS) is a state-level data processing and analysis system that will be able to pull court activity data from multiple sources and integrate them into a coherent whole; generate reports on clearance rates, case inventory, and age of cases; and support branch efforts to manage operations and resources (e.g., caseload allocation, deployment of court interpreters) more efficiently. By providing the branch with meaningful data and analysis, the JDMS will improve adjudicatory outcomes through case management and program evaluation; increase operational efficiency through the use of shared resources; and support supreme court efforts to establish organizational priorities through legislative resource and budget requests. The courts system's collection and management of foreclosure data for the 2013 – 15 Foreclosure Initiative was "proof of concept" for this project, and lawmakers showed their support for it during the 2015 legislative session, appropriating funding for staff augmentation, software development, licensing, hardware, and equipment for the development of the JDMS project.

Current JDMS project goals include establishing a solid foundation for supporting court activity data management at the state level through the enhancement of existing infrastructure and the addition of staff and support elements; and expanding case inventory and case aging statistics from the foreclosure case type to all case types.

The Uniform Case Reporting System (UCR) is a data collection project designed to capture the case activity data that the judicial branch deems necessary for achieving process improvement. This project was galvanized by a February 2015 report of the Judicial Management Council's Performance Workgroup, which recommended that the TCP&A propose clerk collection and reporting requirements that address the collection of specific data elements, detail the transmission of that data in a prescribed format, and establish a meaningful timeframe necessary to enhance performance reporting.

Overseen by the TCP&A's Court Statistics and Workload Committee, the UCR project is another offspring of the judicial branch's Foreclosure Initiative, implemented from 2013 – 2015 to help judges reduce the glut of backlogged foreclosure cases. The initiative included the development of a data collection plan that tracked and monitored case activity data (e.g., specific cases filed, specific cases disposed, and specific cases still pending). Realized in June 2014, this data collection plan represented a standardized way of calculating and looking at workload, and it provided all levels of court with vital information concerning the movement of foreclosure cases through the courts.

In April 2016, the supreme court issued an administrative order that revised and expanded—to **all** case types—the clerk of court data reporting requirements that had been implemented for foreclosure cases. The order also directed the clerks of court to increase the data elements, thereby providing the courts with additional information about courts system workload (on case inventory and status assignment, summary reporting system case type and disposition assignment, and post-judgment re-open and re-closure activity for all case types), and to electronically transmit the data to the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) directly through an approved interface. (Take this link to read the administrative order regarding the [revised uniform case reporting requirements](#).)

The UCR project has been making headway in the judicial branch's data collection endeavors. To ensure the quality and timeliness of the information being collected, the branch is using web services (Florida's judicial branch is one of the first to implement a data streaming infrastructure). Web services enable the easy, near real-time exchange of case activity event data, regardless of the data applications or systems being used (in other words, the clerks', circuits', and OSCA's systems can "talk to" one another). The branch has already developed its web service and is beta testing it: internal testing is complete, and OSCA is now performing connectivity testing with the pilot counties. Currently, the 20 clerks of court are working to transition to UCR reporting, and full reporting by all clerks of court and for all divisions is expected by 2020.

Shared Remote Interpreting

Another major technology initiative in which the TCP&A has been involved is the use of remote interpreting systems to facilitate sharing interpreting resources among different circuits, thereby improving the availability and containing the costs of interpreting resources while maintaining accuracy.

According to [US Census Bureau statistics](#) (2015), 28.1% of Florida's residents speak a language other than English at home, with 11.7% of them speaking English "less than very well." For people whose English language skills are limited, court interpreting services are essential in ensuring their constitutional right of access to justice. However, the branch continues to face challenges in addressing the increased needs for quality interpreting services, given the short supply of qualified interpreters (while large population centers may be home to a substantial number of interpreters, rural areas of the state typically lack the same resources, for instance). By embracing technology, Florida's courts system can minimize these challenges. The shared use of remote interpreting services, through enhanced technological communications, represents an opportunity for courts to significantly improve interpreter services while also using state resources wisely. (For some background about shared remote interpreting services in Florida's trial courts, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

As early as 2010, several circuits began preliminary explorations of sharing remote interpreting services; then in 2014, with funding from the legislature, the branch formally expanded this pilot effort: five circuits began sharing remote interpreting resources, and OSCA housed the call manager. The success of this pilot prompted the supreme court to create the Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup, which developed a business model for sharing remote interpreting across circuit jurisdictions. Among its proposals, the workgroup suggested the creation of a governance committee to make recommendations to the TCP&A, the Court Interpreter Certification Board, and the Trial Court Budget Commission about matters relating to shared remote interpreting services.



Chaired by Mr. Thomas Genung, trial court administrator for the Nineteenth Circuit (third from right), the Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup made recommendations to the supreme court regarding the business processes associated with sharing remote interpreting resources via the assisted use of technology. In 2017, the workgroup—which comprised a large, diverse, and highly collaborative group of participants—was honored with a Prudential Productivity Award and an Excellence in Technology Award.

Chaired by Chief Judge Elizabeth Metzger, Nineteenth Circuit, the [Shared Remote Interpreting Governance Committee](#), created by the supreme court in December 2016, is responsible for establishing the statewide court interpreting pool for remote interpreting and developing recommendations regarding additional funding needs, collecting workload data and needs-based funding information, and overseeing administrative/management issues associated with shared remote interpreting. Among its current projects, the committee is considering adding functionality to enable communication among multi-point connections (a single point-to-point call connects a remote interpreter to one courtroom at a time; a multi-point call would connect a remote interpreter to two courtrooms at a time, e.g., a courtroom and a jail courtroom concurrently).

Electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS)

The appellate courts are also eager to embrace technology solutions to help streamline and aid in the administration of judicial processes such as case management, document management, workflow management, and the seamless integration with electronic filing (e-filing). The appellate courts have been participating in two e-filing and case management solutions: electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS) and iDCA/eDCA.

iDCA/eDCA was originally developed by the First District Court of Appeal (DCA) for workers compensation cases. It is closely connected to the court's existing case management system and includes e-filing, document management, and tasking features designed for the appellate process. It comprises three closely linked sites: Internal DCA, an internal

component for document management for use by judges and law clerks; External DCA, a portal for the transmittal of all filings with the court; and the Case Review system. It has been successfully deployed at all five DCAs.

eFACTS, developed by OSCA's Office of Information Technology, was piloted at the supreme court and the Second DCA. It is a Microsoft web-based application that includes document management; electronic tasking and voting; tracking of administrative matters, assignments, and working documents; report and document generation; public on-line dockets; and secure access to case information. It also accommodates filing through the Florida Courts e-Filing Portal. (This link goes to more information about [e-filing through the portal](#).)

In 2017, modifications were made to begin unifying eFACTS and iDCA/eDCA; the enhancements, which capitalize on the best features from all applications, move the supreme court and the DCAs toward a uniform case management system. The 2017 modifications included the retirement of the older case management system in the DCAs, file storage unification between eFACTS & iDCA/eDCA, and an advanced recusal tracking module. In addition, the Office of Information Technology improved the system's security and performed a major refresh of the server hardware and database technology for both projects. (For more background about the Appellate Courts Technology Solutions, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)



Mobile Technologies

Many of the technology initiatives discussed above were designed to monitor and measure court performance, to improve court processes and increase operational efficiencies, to reduce court costs, and generally to support the mission of the courts and those who work to carry out that mission. However, the branch is also focused on developing technology to better meet the needs of the people who use the courts. Its most recent innovation is the Florida Courts Help app.



Research shows that people are “increasingly connected to the world of digital information” via their smartphones or other mobile devices ([Pew Research Center](#)). For instance, 40 percent of smartphone owners use their mobile device to look up government services or information ([Pew Research Center](#)). This is no less true for court users. For instance, of the approximately two million unique visitors who access [flcourts.org](#) each year, almost one-third of them are using their mobile devices. Many of these visitors are self-represented litigants seeking family law forms—and the Florida Courts Help app responds to their need for mobile-friendly information. Developed by Office of the State Courts Administrator staff, under the direction of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice, this app is a repository of resources for Floridians seeking a divorce, adoption, orders of protection, a name change, and other family law issues. The app provides people with access to 186 supreme court-approved family law forms that can be filled out on the device; links and contact information for help centers around the state; plain-language instructions and descriptions of first steps and next actions; and tips for a full range of legal help from multiple online resources, free and low-cost legal services, and lawyer referrals. The Florida Courts Help app is available at app stores, and links and instructions are also available at [Help.flcourts.org](#).

Behind the Scenes

Working diligently in the background on the bold initiatives described above is the courts system's Office of Information Technology Services (OITS), which plays a fundamental role in advancing computer-assisted information and communications technologies in state courts throughout Florida. In



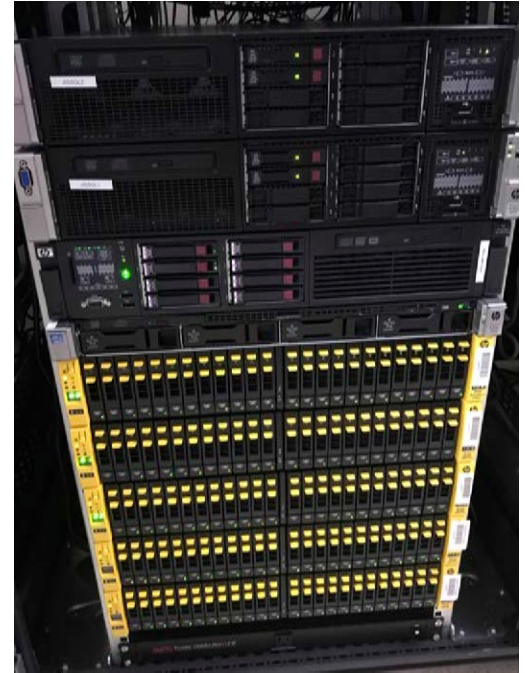
The Florida Courts Help app provides a repository of resources to Floridians seeking a divorce, adoption, orders of protection, a name change, and other family law issues. It was developed by Office of the State Courts Administrator staff, under the direction of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.

In addition to providing support to those court technology initiatives, the OITS embarked on an Application Modernization Project to provide better response times, greater reliability, and an updated user interface for some applications; it created a Cross Jurisdiction Team to manage changes to and implementations of computer applications that are being utilized in circuits across the state; and it installed software that allows the office to monitor applications and system health in real-time, alerting the OITS at the first sign of problems or slowdowns.

Moreover, included within the OITS is a Support Services Team, which assists with court IT operations in all 93 courts statewide (67 county, 20 circuit, and five appellate courts plus the supreme court). Housed in OSCA, this team supplies and maintains reliable technical operations for servers, data storage, disaster recovery, security, mobile devices, phone support (Voice over Internet Protocol), teleconferencing, audio visual services, and all related networking infrastructure.

Lately, the Support Services Team has chiefly focused on modernizing/upgrading technology infrastructure, boosting technology security, and strengthening backup recovery and disaster recovery operations. Among the team's recent infrastructure modernization efforts, for instance, it procured, configured, installed, and deployed new servers for the DCAs, greatly increasing processing capacity while enhancing continuity of operations ability for the courts. Nor did the old servers go to waste: repurposing them, the OITS created a development/testing/user acceptance environment in which OSCA staff can develop in-house applications and test them before making them available to users. The team also updated and added additional data storage capacity for the supreme court, the DCAs, and the disaster recovery site, responding to the ever-growing storage requirements both for daily operations and for the eFACTS application; moreover, the team upgraded, replaced, and relocated the wireless access points in the supreme court, the DCAs, and OSCA, considerably expanding the wireless footprint and the bandwidth available to mobile devices in these facilities. To heighten technology security, the team completed the deployment of next-generation firewalls at the supreme court, the DCAs, and OSCA. And to fortify backup and disaster recovery operations, it established a remote disaster recovery site and also deployed new backup/recovery appliances for the supreme court, the DCAs, and OSCA.

The team was also responsible for carrying out major technology relocation operations for three appellate courts: the Second DCA (its Lakeland courthouse was deemed a "sick building," and judges and court personnel, along with all the technology infrastructure and equipment, were moved to temporary quarters in Lakeland and to the courthouse in Tampa); the Third DCA (technology infrastructure and equipment were relocated after the courthouse underwent extensive renovations); and the Fourth DCA (a brand new courthouse was constructed, so everything was transferred from the old to the new building). For each of these changes, the Support Services Team had to move server rooms, network infrastructure, desktops, phones, and all related equipment—while causing minimal disruption to court operations.



To meet the courts system's ever-growing storage requirements, OSCA's Office of Information Technology Services updated and increased the data storage capacity for the supreme court, the district courts of appeal, and the disaster recovery site.



OSCA's Office of Information Technology Services deployed new backup/recovery appliances for the supreme court, OSCA, and the district courts of appeal; these appliances significantly increased backup capacity, increased data restore capability, and improved the courts system's overall disaster recovery/continuity of operations posture.

Emergency Preparedness

The 9/11 tragedy jolted the courts system's development of branch-wide policies and procedures for anticipating and managing emergencies that could disrupt court operations: within a few months of the terrorist attacks, then Chief Justice Charles Wells established the Workgroup on Emergency Preparedness and directed it to "develop a plan for the State Courts System to better respond to emergency situations." He urged the workgroup to be guided by two policy goals: to protect the health and safety of everyone inside the courts and to keep the courts open to ensure justice for the people. For he recognized that the security of the facility and of everyone in it—the court users who are conducting business in the building, and the judicial officers and court personnel who are working in the building—is central to the judicial branch's constitutional mandate to ensure that justice is administered without delay. (More background about the branch's emergency preparedness measures is available in the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

Emergency management encompasses preparation for unpreventable natural disasters such as pandemics, tropical storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods (indeed, the emergencies that typically assail the state are weather-connected: sustaining 40 percent of all US hurricanes strikes, Florida is often referred to as the most hurricane-prone state in the nation, according to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)). Emergency management also includes being prepared for human-made cataclysms: calamities like oil spills, biohazards, extended information systems outages, and military or terrorist attack-related incidents. Preparing for threats and emergencies is a continuous responsibility, and the judicial branch takes a multi-layered approach to meeting this responsibility.

For instance, soon after the supreme court approved the [2002 report of the Workgroup on Emergency Preparedness](#), each court identified its mission-essential functions and developed a preparedness plan (which includes emergency and administrative procedures) as well as a continuity of operations plan. Furthermore, each court designated a court emergency management team (to maintain court operations in a disaster situation), an emergency coordinating officer, and a public information officer (to assist in the coordination of emergency response activities and provide information to, and answer questions from, the media and the public). In addition, the supreme court established the United Supreme Court/Branch Court Emergency Management Group to recommend policy for, prepare for, and respond to emergencies both in the supreme court building and in state courts across Florida.

More recent endeavors include the supreme court's 2015 creation of the Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security, chaired by Supreme Court Marshal Silvester Dawson. The task force is charged with constructing standards and best practices relating to the safety and security of the supreme court and the five District Courts of Appeal. Specifically, it is responsible for addressing security staffing models and levels; safety policies and practices; security personnel qualifications and training; site hardening; weapons and other security equipment; dignitary protection; implementation of ADA Standards for Accessible Design and other state and federal regulations affecting safety in appellate court facilities; and disaster preparedness. During the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the task force developed a methodology for



Early on Sunday, September 10, Hurricane Irma made landfall in the Florida Keys. This image shows the Fifth District Court of Appeal, in Daytona Beach, at the height of the storm surge on September 11.



This photo shows the grounds directly outside the Fifth District Court of Appeal, in Daytona Beach, at the height of the storm surge on September 11.

determining appellate court security staffing levels and for ascertaining the basic complement of security equipment that should be available at each of the appellate courts. And to ensure high-level performance, the task force began reviewing training programs relevant to the work of the appellate courts: it has been surveying the training needs of appellate court officers and security personnel as well as researching and reviewing the training programs available (including those being used in other states), with an eye toward recommending a list of training topics and programs, a plan for offering them, and a projection of the additional resources that may be necessary to develop or support them. (This link goes to the administrative order governing the work of the [Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security](#).)

In addition, in August 2016, under the auspices of the Judicial Management Council, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga established the Trial Court Security Workgroup. Chaired by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, this workgroup was conceived to address goal 4.1 of the long-range plan: “Protect all judges court personnel, court users, and facilities through effective security, emergency preparedness and continuity of operations plans.” More immediately, its creation responds to the increasing incidences of mass violence and anti-government violence across the globe. (To read more about the responsibilities of this workgroup, please see the above [article on the Judicial Management Council](#).)

Moreover, to support emergency preparedness efforts in courts across the state, Mr. Steven Hall, chief of OSCA’s General Services Unit and the branch’s statewide emergency coordinating officer, organizes monthly conference calls for all the courts system’s emergency coordinating officers. Not surprisingly, most of the preoccupying topics in 2016 and 2017 were hurricane-related. After a record 11 years without a landfall, Florida was hit with two hurricanes in late 2016: Hermine struck the Panhandle in September; Matthew buffeted the east coast in October. Then in September 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall in the Florida Keys: the storm, 400 miles wide, wreaked havoc as it journeyed up the backbone of the state, razing neighborhoods, flooding vast portions of Northeast Florida, and knocking out power to millions of residents. Courts had to close in every part of the state.

Mr. Hall offered several “lessons learned” from the recent hurricane hits, particularly Irma. For instance, he emphasized that, “No matter how much you plan, you can never plan for every contingency. It is very important to test those plans, but sometimes a basic test isn’t quite enough.” He gave the example of running a monthly generator test, pointing out that “a ‘true’ live load isn’t placed on that generator during that test, rather a simulated load”—which may not provide an accurate picture of potential problems. Therefore, periodic live load testing is essential.

He also stressed the importance of communication during an emergency. Irma forced most of the state courts to test their emergency communication plans—but widespread power outages and the controlled

shutdown of the courts system’s statewide network disrupted many of these plans. Nonetheless, “Courts were able to tweak their communication methods during the situation to adapt to the current reality,” switching to cloud-based email systems, cloud-based apps, and text messaging to communicate. Along these lines, he also noted the critical role that social media played in keeping judges and court personnel informed: leading up to the storm, during its onslaught, and for days after it left the state, Facebook and Twitter were often the most reliable means—and sometimes, the only means—of interchange, reinforcing the importance of social media as a communication tool, especially during crisis situations. He also underlined the importance of conducting local and statewide conference calls: “Leading up to the event and for days after, these calls provided valuable information to assist in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from the hurricane.”

Finally, he pointed out that emergencies expose areas that can use improvement, and these hurricanes prompted court emergency management team members to review their preparedness plan and their continuity of operations plan and make necessary adjustments to ensure that their court is as prepared as possible to respond to crises, recover from them, and mitigate against their impact. Issues that Irma brought to light have led to additions to the list of items for inclusion in individuals’ and units’ preparedness kits (manuals, copies of policies, particular supplies, etc.); to revisions to the checklists for various processes and procedures (especially those not done often); and to improvements in strategies for facilitating timely, adequate communication and reporting.



Just a few days after Hurricane Irma blasted the Keys, Judge Luis Garcia, Sixteenth Circuit, conducted first appearances in the mess hall of the jail in Marathon, which is in the middle of the Florida Keys. The photo is a testament to the effectiveness of the courts system’s continuity of operations plans.

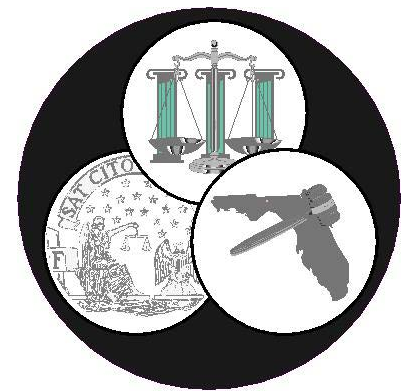
Long-Range Issue #5:**Maintain a Professional, Ethical, and Skilled Judiciary and Workforce**

Justice depends on the competence and quality of judges and court employees. These professionals handle complex legal issues and court procedures, address difficult legal and ethical issues, and face increased expectations from court users. Providing advanced levels of education and development will enable those who work within the courts system to effectively perform the challenging work of the courts and meet the needs of those whom they serve.

To meet the demands of justice in the twenty-first century, judicial officers and court staff must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve and perform at the highest professional levels. Recognizing this imperative, the long-range plan recommends that the branch “provide timely education and training to judges and court employees to ensure high-level performance.”

Education for Judges, Quasi-Judicial Officers, and Court Personnel

Various entities within the judicial branch are committed to developing high-quality education and training opportunities for the people who work in Florida’s courts, making efficient and effective use of limited funding and staff resources. Among them are the many circuits and DCAs that design continuing education programs for select categories of their court personnel (e.g., court interpreters, staff attorneys, managers); the members of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity; and several OSCA units (such as the Office of Court Education, the Office of Court Improvement, the Florida Dispute Resolution Center, the Court Services Unit, and the branch’s statewide ADA coordinator). Readers can learn about this bounty of instructional offerings elsewhere in this annual report.



This section of the report focuses on the education programs and resources supported by the Florida Court Education Council (FCEC), which was established by the supreme court in 1978 to coordinate and oversee the creation and maintenance of a comprehensive education program for judges and some court personnel groups and to manage the budget that sustains these ventures. Chaired by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, the council, with the support of OSCA’s Office of Court Education, provides continuing education through live programs, both statewide and local, and through distance learning events, publications, and other self-learning resources. (For additional background on court education in Florida, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#). In Florida, continuing judicial education efforts were formalized in 1972; the *Short History* also includes an article on the [History of Judiciary Education in Florida](#).)

Education for Judges and Quasi-Judicial Officers

Judges are required to earn a minimum of 30 approved credit hours of continuing judicial education every three years, and new judges have to satisfy additional requirements. To help judges meet their education obligations, the FCEC works closely each year with the leaders of the three judicial conferences—the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida, the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges, and the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges—and the two judicial colleges—the Florida Judicial College and the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies.

During the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, annual education programs were offered by the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges (81 participants, faculty, and staff), the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges (521 participants, faculty, and staff), and the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida (275 participants, faculty, and staff). In addition, the Florida Judicial College, designed for trial court judges who are new to the bench as well as all new general magistrates and child support enforcement hearing officers, facilitated its three-phase program: Phase I is a pre-bench program that includes a series of orientation sessions and a trial skills workshop (157 participants, faculty, and staff); Phase II focuses on more substantive and procedural matters and includes a “Fundamentals” portion for judges who are preparing to rotate to a new division (177 participants, faculty, and staff); the third phase consists of a year-long mentoring program for new judges. The Florida Judicial College also offered its New Appellate Judges Program for the judges new to the appellate bench (21 participants, faculty, and staff). Also during the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, judges and quasi-judicial officers could

apply to attend the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, a comprehensive continuing judicial education program for those seeking to hone existing skills or to delve deeply into a subject matter area (443 participants, faculty, and staff). The FCEC also sponsored a DUI Adjudication Lab (39 participants, faculty, and staff) and an education program for chief judges and trial court administrators (27 participants, faculty, and staff).

Finally, the FCEC supported two Faculty Training courses, which are two-day trainings designed to teach judges how to be effective teachers of other judges (40 participants, faculty, and staff). Annually, thanks to the judicial branch's extensive roster of faculty-trained judges, the FCEC is able to offer hundreds of hours of in-house trainings that are tailored to the specifics of Florida law, which means that Florida's judges are largely able to get the education and training they need in-state.

Education for Court Personnel

The long-range plan emphasizes that, like judges, court employees should receive timely education and training to ensure high-level performance. To meet this goal, the FCEC's Florida Court Personnel Committee, chaired by Judge Angela Cowden, Tenth Circuit, with the support of OSCA's Office of Court Education, continues to develop education and training opportunities for employees who work within the courts system.

Since 2008, the FCEC has provided funding for numerous statewide education initiatives for court personnel groups as well as funding assistance to support local education programs developed by court personnel. In fiscal year 2016 – 17, three statewide events and 10 local events received funding assistance. The Florida Court Personnel Committee's big, statewide event is the Florida Court Personnel Institute. A two-day program designed to accommodate the education needs of Florida's court employees, the 2017 Florida Court Personnel Institute—the courts system's sixth—offered four tracks: Language and Culture of Florida Courts; More than Litigation; Implementing the Long-Range Strategic Plan; and a Faculty Training course for those seeking to conduct trainings for other court employees (146 participants, faculty, and staff for the four tracks). The other two statewide programs funded by the FCEC were the Florida Trial Court Staff Attorneys Conference (46 participants)



Held in Tallahassee in 2017, the New Appellate Judges Program offered participants several opportunities to interact with the supreme court justices and hear some “words of wisdom” about being an appellate judge. Here, Justice Charles T. Canady converses with Judge M. Kimmerly Thomas, appointed to the First District Court of Appeal in June 2016.



To meet the continuing judicial education requirements of Florida's judges, the Florida Court Education Council must offer hundreds of hours of continuing judiciary education each year—a formidable challenge, if not for the dedication and generosity of an extensive roster of Florida judges who are trained to serve as faculty for judicial education courses. Among them are Judge Peter Ramsberger, Sixth Circuit, and Judge Carroll Kelly, Miami-Dade County, who have worked together for 17 years to provide domestic violence education to judges across the state. In part for their longstanding commitment to judicial education, each was awarded a Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence in 2017.



Students at the New Appellate Judges Program have a panorama of opportunities to contemplate, analyze, discuss, and put to the test practices designed to help them do their jobs better. One of the many topics they address is the importance of collegiality on the appellate bench. Facilitating a lively colloquy on the subject are Judge Edwin Scales (Third DCA), Judge Kent Wetherell (First DCA), Judge Nelly Khouzam (Second DCA), and Judge Kevin Emas (Third DCA).

and the Court ADA Coordinators Education Program (27 participants). The 10 local training programs that received FCEC funding addressed topics like Communicating Effectively in the Workplace, Accountability in Action, Employee Management, Developing High Impact Teams, and the Ethics of Public Service for Court Staff (altogether, more than 800 court employees benefited from these local education events). Also in the 2016 – 17 fiscal year, the FCEC supported the Trial Court Administrators Annual Education Program (28 participants) and the Appellate Clerks and Marshals Education Program (16 participants).

Publications and Other Self-Learning Resources

To supplement the scope of training and education offerings for judges and court personnel, the long-range plan recommends that the branch “develop technology-based approaches to complement existing education programs for judges and court employees.” To help the courts system achieve this goal, the FCEC supports judicial and staff efforts to develop new court education publications, update existing ones and devise distance learning events.

The FCEC’s Publications Committee, with the assistance of OSCA’s Office of Court Education, worked steadily to strengthen its repository of online publications during the fiscal year. Among those updated were *An Aid to Understanding Canon 7*, *Baker Act Benchguide*, *Civil Jury Trial Benchbook*, *Criminal Benchguide for Circuit Judges*, *Domestic (Interpersonal) Violence Case Law Summaries* (updated quarterly), *Florida Benchguide on Court Interpreting*, *Florida Small Claims Rules Annotated*, *Fundamentals for Traffic Hearing Officers Manual*, *Judicial Ethics Benchguide*, *Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee Opinions Topical Index* (updated quarterly), *Judicial Administration Benchguide*, *OSCA Employee Manual*, *Residential Foreclosure Benchguide*, *Small Claims Survival Guide*, *Traffic Hearing Officer Manual*, and *Traffic-Related Appellate Opinion Summaries* (prepared quarterly).

In addition, the Office of Court Education is actively expanding distance learning opportunities. The office is committed to a blended learning model that utilizes online learning to augment in-person learning experiences. To this end, the office again partnered with the National Judicial College to offer no-cost webcasts on various topics. It also updated its web-based Fundamentals for Family Court Judges course (offered on demand to all new and rotating family court judges). The office continues to enhance its distance learning infrastructure and plans to offer more distance learning events in the future.

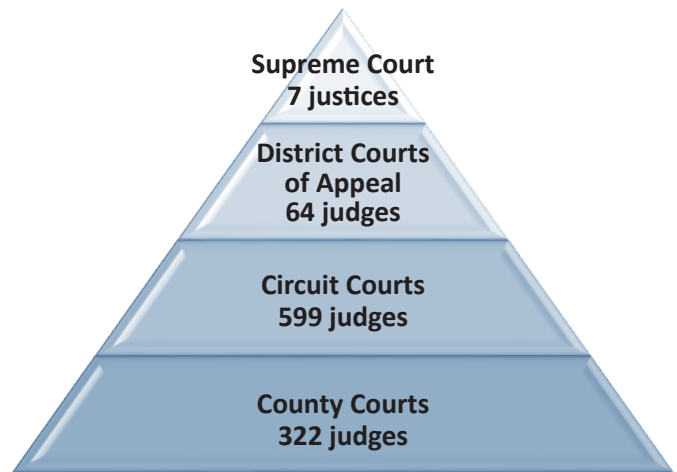


FLORIDA'S COURT STRUCTURE

Florida's Court Structure

Florida's court system consists of the following entities: two appellate-level courts (the supreme court and five district courts of appeal) and two trial-level courts (20 circuit courts and 67 county courts). The chief justice (who may serve successive two-year terms, not to exceed a total of eight years) presides as the chief administrative officer of the judicial branch.

On July 1, 1972, the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) was created with initial emphasis on developing a uniform case reporting system in order to provide information about activities of the judiciary. Additional responsibilities include preparing the operating budget for the judicial branch, projecting the need for new judges, and serving as the liaison between the court system and the auxiliary agencies of the court, national court research and planning agencies, the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the public, business community, and media.



Appellate Courts

Supreme Court

- Seven justices, six-year terms
- Sits in Tallahassee
- Five justices constitute a quorum

District Courts of Appeal

- 64 judges, six-year terms
- Five districts:
 - 1st District: Tallahassee, 15 judges
 - 2nd District: Lakeland, 16 judges
 - 3rd District: Miami, 10 judges
 - 4th District: West Palm Beach, 12 judges
 - 5th District: Daytona Beach, 11 judges
- Cases generally reviewed by three-judge panels

Trial Courts

Circuit Courts

- 599 judges, six-year terms
- 20 judicial circuits
- Number of judges in each circuit based on caseload
- Judges preside individually, not on panels

County Courts

- 322 judges, six-year terms
- At least one judge in each of the 67 counties
- Judges preside individually, not on panels

FLORIDA'S COURT STRUCTURE

Supreme Court of Florida

The supreme court is the highest court in Florida. To constitute a quorum to conduct business, five of the seven justices must be present, and four justices must agree on a decision in each case.

Mandatory jurisdiction includes death penalty cases, district court decisions declaring a state statute or provision of the state constitution invalid, bond validations, rules of court procedure, and statewide agency actions relating to public utilities. The court also has exclusive authority to regulate the admission and discipline of lawyers in Florida as well as the authority to discipline and remove judges.

District Courts of Appeal

The majority of trial court decisions that are appealed are reviewed by three-judge panels of the district courts of appeal (DCAs). In each district court, a chief judge, who is selected by the body of district court judges, is responsible for the administrative duties of the court.

The district courts decide most appeals from circuit court cases and many administrative law appeals from actions by the executive branch. In addition, the district courts of appeal must review county court decisions invalidating a provision of Florida's constitution or statutes, and they may review an order or judgment of a county court that is certified by the county court to be of great public importance.

Circuit Courts

The majority of jury trials in Florida take place before circuit court judges. The circuit courts are referred to as the courts of general jurisdiction. Circuit courts hear all criminal and civil matters not within the jurisdiction of county courts, including family law, juvenile delinquency and dependency, mental health, probate, guardianship, and civil matters over \$15,000. They also hear some appeals from county court rulings and from administrative action if provided by general law. Finally, they have the power to issue extraordinary writs necessary to the complete exercise of their jurisdiction.

County Courts

Each of Florida's 67 counties has at least one county court judge. The number of judges in each county court varies with the population and caseload of the county. County courts are courts of limited jurisdiction, which is established by statute. The county courts are sometimes referred to as "the people's courts" because a large part of their work involves citizen disputes such as violations of municipal and county ordinances, traffic offenses, landlord-tenant disputes, misdemeanor criminal matters, and monetary disputes up to and including \$15,000. In addition, county court judges may hear simplified dissolution of marriage cases.

DCA

1st District:	circuits 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 14
2nd District:	circuits 6, 10, 12, 13, 20
3rd District:	circuits 11, 16
4th District:	circuits 15, 17, 19
5th District:	circuits 5, 7, 9, 18

Circuits

Circuit

Counties

1st	Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton counties
2nd	Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Wakulla counties
3rd	Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor counties
4th	Clay, Duval, Nassau counties
5th	Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion, Sumter counties
6th	Pasco, Pinellas counties
7th	Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, Volusia counties
8th	Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, Union counties
9th	Orange, Osceola counties
10th	Hardee, Highlands, Polk counties
11th	Miami-Dade County
12th	DeSoto, Manatee, Sarasota counties
13th	Hillsborough County
14th	Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Washington counties
15th	Palm Beach County
16th	Monroe County
17th	Broward County
18th	Brevard, Seminole counties
19th	Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie counties
20th	Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee counties

Office of the State Courts Administrator

The Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) was created in 1972 to serve the chief justice in carrying out his or her responsibilities as the chief administrative officer of the judicial branch. OSCA was established to provide professional court management and administration for the state's judicial branch—basically, the non-adjudicatory services and functions necessary for the smooth operation of the branch, which includes the Supreme Court of Florida, the five district courts of appeal, the 20 circuit courts, and the 67 county courts.

OSCA prepares the judicial branch's budget requests to the legislature, monitors legislation, and serves as a point of contact for legislators and their staff regarding issues related to the state courts system. In addition, OSCA coordinates a host of educational programs designed to ensure that judges and court employees have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve and perform at the highest professional levels.

Among other duties, OSCA also collects and analyzes statistical information relevant to court operations; implements administrative and legislative initiatives for family, dependency, and delinquency court cases; develops long-range and operational plans; offers statewide mediation training and certification through the Dispute Resolution Center; evaluates the qualifications of court interpreters; coordinates and produces administrative and judicial education publications; and provides technical support for the trial and appellate courts, including support for the state-funded computer infrastructure of Florida's courts system. For more information about OSCA, visit the Florida State Courts website at <http://www.flcourts.org/>



State Courts Administrator Patricia "PK" Jameson.

Trial Court Administrators

Each of the 20 circuits in Florida has a trial court administrator, who supports the chief judge in his or her constitutional role as the administrative supervisor of the circuit and county courts. The office of the trial court administrator provides professional staff support to ensure effective and efficient court operations.

Trial court administrators have multiple responsibilities. They manage judicial operations such as courtroom scheduling, facilities management, caseflow policy, ADA policy, statistical analysis, inter-branch and intergovernmental relations, technology planning, jury oversight, public information, and emergency planning. They also oversee court business operations, including personnel, planning and budgeting, finance and accounting, purchasing, property and records, and staff training.

Moreover, trial court administrators manage and provide support for essential court resources including court reporting, court interpreters, expert witnesses, staff attorneys, magistrates and hearing officers, mediation, and case management. For links to the homepages of Florida's circuit courts, go to <http://www.flcourts.org/florida-courts/trial-courts-circuit.stml>

Marshals of the Supreme Court and the District Courts of Appeal

The supreme court and each of the five district courts of appeal have a marshal—a constitutional officer under Article V of the Florida Constitution. The DCA marshals' responsibilities are similar to those of the trial court administrators: the operational budget, purchasing, court facilities and grounds, contracts, personnel, and security. The supreme court marshal is responsible for the security of court property, justices, and employees; the management of the buildings and grounds; and administrative, logistical, and operational support of the supreme court. In addition, the supreme court marshal has the power to execute the process of the court throughout the state. For links to the homepages of Florida's DCAs, go to <http://www.flcourts.org/florida-courts/district-court-appeal.stml>

COURT COMMITTEES

Court Committees

Although the Florida State Courts System is administered by the chief justice and the other supreme court justices, the policy development strategy of the judicial branch is, in many regards, highly synergistic. Committees—whose membership generally comprises judges and court personnel, and may include justice partners and topic experts as well—are the means established by the supreme court for gathering input on judicial branch policies affecting the administration of justice.

The supreme court may appoint a committee when a specific issue or concern is brought to its attention or when it seeks to evaluate and improve the courts system’s performance in a particular area, for instance. Committees usually receive their authority and directive through an administrative order of the chief justice. While most committees have no direct policy-making authority, they do play an important advisory role and make recommendations for consideration by the supreme court.

Court committees serve a vital function in the judicial branch, and, through their appointment, the branch benefits from the rich intellectual, experiential, social, and personal background of each member.

Under the current court committee structure, the supreme court utilizes five different types of committees: councils, commissions, steering committees, workgroups/task forces, and other committees. Below is information about the supreme court committees that are staffed entirely or in part by the Office of the State Courts Administrator.

Councils

A council is responsible for addressing judicial administration issues that have statewide impact, affect multiple levels of the court system, or affect multiple constituencies in the court community. Council membership includes internal and external representation.

The Judicial Management Council (JMC), chaired by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, serves as a focused advisory body to assist the chief justice and supreme court in identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and the means to address them. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.225, [AOSC16-30](#), and the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).

Commissions

A commission addresses high-level policy issues that span the divisions and/or levels of the court. Membership of court commissions primarily consists of judicial officers and court personnel.

The District Court of Appeal Budget Commission (DCABC), chaired by Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA, oversees the preparation and implementation of the district court component of the judicial branch budget; it is directly responsible for recommending budgeting and funding policies and procedures for the district court budgets so that the funding requirements of each of the DCAs can be adequately addressed while promoting statewide operational consistency. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.235 and [AOSC16-67](#).

The Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC), chaired by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, oversees the preparation and implementation of the trial court component of the judicial branch budget; it is directly responsible for recommending budgeting and funding policies and procedures for the trial court budgets in order to support a trial court system that will effectively carry out the administration of justice. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.230 and [AOSC16-29](#).

[The Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability](#) (DCAP&A), chaired by Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, proposes policies and procedures on matters related to the efficient and effective functioning of Florida’s district courts through the development of comprehensive resource management, performance measurement, and accountability programs. For more information, see [AOSC16-32](#).

COURT COMMITTEES

[The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability](#) (TCP&A), chaired by Judge Diana Moreland, Twelfth Circuit, proposes policies and procedures on matters related to the efficient and effective functioning of Florida's trial courts through the development of comprehensive resource management, performance measurement, and accountability programs. For more information, see [AOSC16-39](#).

[The Florida Courts Technology Commission](#) (FCTC), chaired by Judge Lisa Munyon, Ninth Circuit, oversees, manages, and directs the development and use of technology within the judicial branch under the direction of the Florida Supreme Court as specified in [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.236.

[The Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice](#), chaired by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, was established to study the remaining unmet civil legal needs of disadvantaged, low income, and moderate income Floridians. It "bring[s] together the three branches of government, the Bar, civil legal aid providers, the business community, and other well-known stakeholders in a coordinated effort to identify and remove...economic barriers to civil justice." For more information, see [AOSC14-65](#) and [AOSC16-71](#) as well as the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).

The Florida Court Education Council (FCEC), chaired by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, oversees the development and maintenance of a comprehensive educational program for Florida judges and certain court personnel groups. The council's responsibilities include making budgetary, programmatic, and policy recommendations to the supreme court regarding continuing education for Florida judges and certain court professionals. For more information, see [AOSC16-42](#) and [section 25.384, Florida Statutes](#).

The Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and Policy, chaired by Judge Rodney Smith, Eleventh Circuit, assists the supreme court in exercising its power and performing its duties to establish rules of practice and procedure for court-ordered mediation and arbitration. For more information, see [AOSC16-40](#).

Steering Committees

A steering committee represents the interests of a particular court division. Steering committees develop an aspirational vision of the ideal court division; recommend models, standards, and best practices; and conduct court improvement initiatives. Steering committees also address the impact on their topical assignment area of new legislation, case law, federal guidelines, and other changes.

The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (FCC), chaired by Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, seeks to establish a fully integrated, comprehensive approach to handling all cases involving children and families; it works to encourage and facilitate improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of family court operations. For more information, see [AOSC16-46](#).

The Criminal Court Steering Committee, chaired by Judge James Hankinson, Second Circuit, develops consistent and expedited recommendations to the supreme court regarding changes required by legislative enactments, judicial decisions, or other events or circumstances involving criminal law matters. For more information, see [AOSC16-34](#).

Workgroups/Task Forces

A workgroup or task force is appointed to serve for a specific period of time or to address a specific topic or targeted issue. Workgroups and task forces conduct studies, prepare reports, and take other appropriate action as directed by the court.

The Unified Committee on Judicial Compensation, chaired by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, serves as the court system's mechanism for addressing and advancing judicial compensation and benefits issues; the committee develops and recommends to the supreme court judicial pay and benefits priorities and advocates for judicial pay and benefits issues approved by the court for inclusion in the judicial branch's annual legislative budget request. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.224.

COURT COMMITTEES

[*The Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts*](#), chaired by Judge Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade County, addresses the needs of individuals with serious mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders who become involved in the justice system. For more information, see [AOSC16-44](#).

[The Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity](#), chaired by Judge Peter Estrada, Twentieth Circuit, helps advance the state courts system's efforts to eliminate from court operations bias that is based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, financial status, or any characteristic that is without legal relevance. For more information, see [AOSC16-43](#).

The Appellate Court Technology Committee, chaired by Judge Stevan Northcutt, Second DCA, is a standing committee of the Florida Courts Technology Commission; it provides technical guidance and consultation to the commission regarding information systems development and operational policies and procedures relating to automation in the district courts of appeal. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.236](#) and [AOSC16-38](#).

The Electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS) Change Advisory Board, chaired by Justice Ricky Polston, assists the supreme court in facilitating the continued and timely implementation of eFACTS. For more information, see [AOSC14-16](#).

The Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security, chaired by Marshal Silvester Dawson, Florida Supreme Court, develops proposed standards and best practices relating to safety and security of the supreme court and district courts of appeal. For more information, see [AOSC16-45](#).

Other Committees

This category encompasses committees required by supreme court opinion, statutory provisions, or other requirements; by reason of their regulatory or other responsibilities, these entities may operate more independently from court oversight than the other kinds of committees.

The Committee on Standard Jury Instructions in Criminal Cases, chaired by Judge Jerri Collins, Eighteenth Circuit, makes recommendations to the supreme court regarding changes that are required in jury instructions in criminal cases; these changes are in response to legislative enactments, judicial decisions, or other events or circumstances that affect the presentation of cases to trial juries. The committee also reviews the standard instructions for errors and inaccuracies and recommends to the court amendments and revisions that would be beneficial to the administration of justice [Authority: 327 So. 2d 6 (Fla. 1976)].

The Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee, chaired by Judge Spencer Levine, Fourth DCA, renders written advisory opinions to inquiring judges concerning the propriety of contemplated judicial and non-judicial conduct. [Authority: 327 So. 2d 5 (Fla. 1976)]

The Mediation Qualifications Discipline and Review Board is responsible for accepting grievances against certified mediators; determining probable cause with regard to grievances filed against certified mediators; conducting hearings in relation to grievance proceedings, if necessary; and sanctioning certified mediators, if appropriate. The board includes judges, county mediators, family mediators, circuit mediators, dependency mediators, and attorneys. For more information, see [Florida Rule for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediators](#) 10.730.

The Mediation Training Review Board is responsible for reviewing complaints filed against certified mediation training programs. Members include judges and county, family, circuit, and dependency mediators. For more information, see [OSC13-41](#).

The Mediator Ethics Advisory Committee, chaired by Ms Susan Dubow, provides written advisory opinions to mediators concerning interpretations of the rules and guidance on standards of conduct. For more information, see [Florida Rule for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediators](#) 10.900(a).

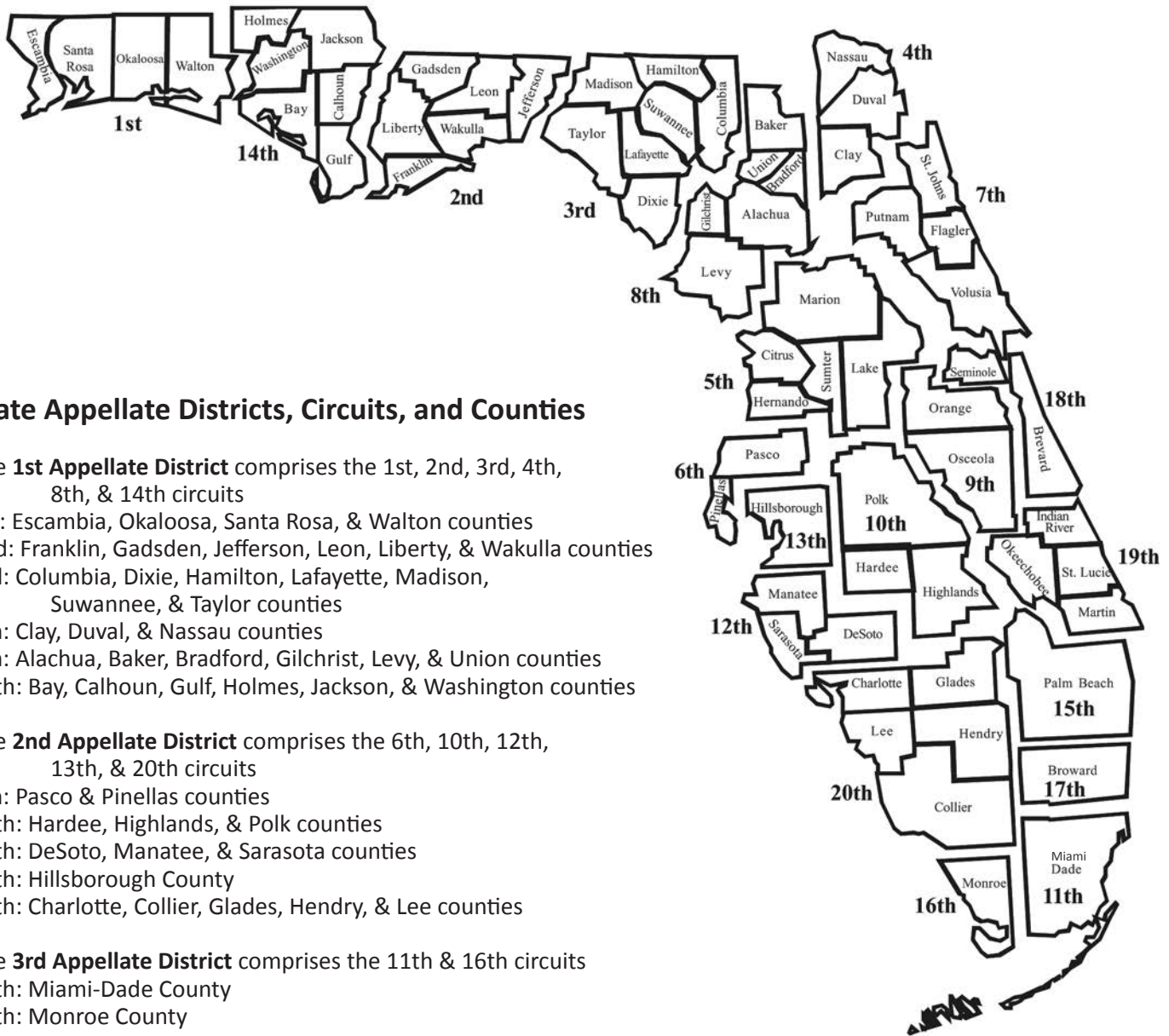
COURT COMMITTEES

The Parenting Coordinator Disciplinary Review Board considers complaints against qualified and court-appointed parenting coordinators. Membership includes judges, attorneys, and parenting coordinators from across the state. For more information, see [AOSC16-95](#).

The Court Interpreter Certification Board, chaired by Judge Kevin Abdoney, Polk County, assists the supreme court in overseeing the certification and regulation of court interpreters. For more information, see [Florida Rule for Certification and Regulation of Spoken Language Court Interpreters](#) 14.100.

The Local Rule Advisory Committee, chaired by Judge Ross Bilbrey, First DCA, makes recommendations to the supreme court concerning local rules and administrative orders submitted pursuant to [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.215(e).

MAP OF FLORIDA'S COURT JURISDICTIONS



State Appellate Districts, Circuits, and Counties

The **1st Appellate District** comprises the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 8th, & 14th circuits

1st: Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, & Walton counties

2nd: Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, & Wakulla counties

3rd: Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, & Taylor counties

4th: Clay, Duval, & Nassau counties

8th: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, & Union counties

14th: Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, & Washington counties

The **2nd Appellate District** comprises the 6th, 10th, 12th, 13th, & 20th circuits

6th: Pasco & Pinellas counties

10th: Hardee, Highlands, & Polk counties

12th: DeSoto, Manatee, & Sarasota counties

13th: Hillsborough County

20th: Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, & Lee counties

The **3rd Appellate District** comprises the 11th & 16th circuits

11th: Miami-Dade County

16th: Monroe County

The **4th Appellate District** comprises the 15th, 17th, & 19th circuits

15th: Palm Beach County

17th: Broward County

19th: Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, & St. Lucie counties

The **5th Appellate District** comprises the 5th, 7th, 9th, & 18th circuits

5th: Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion, & Sumter counties

7th: Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, & Volusia counties

9th: Orange & Osceola counties

18th: Brevard & Seminole counties

JUDICIAL CERTIFICATION TABLE

District Court of Appeal

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2008	-1	-1	-1	n/a	61
2009	0	0	0	n/a	61
2010	1	0	0	n/a	61
2011	0	0	0	n/a	61
2012	2	1	0	0%	61
2013	2	1	0	0%	61
2014	3	3	3	100%	64
2015	0	0	0	n/a	64
2016	0	0	0	n/a	64
2017	0	0	0	n/a	64

Judicial Certification

The supreme court has used a weighted caseload system to evaluate the need for new trial court judgeships since 1999, and, for DCA judges, since 2006. The weighted caseload system analyzes Florida's caseload statistics according to complexity. Cases that are typically complex, such as capital murder cases, receive a higher weight, while cases that are generally less complex, such as civil traffic cases, receive a lower weight. These weights are then applied to case filing statistics to determine the need for additional judgeships.

The need for additional judgeships remains high for several reasons: an absence of funding for previously certified judgeships, overall increases in judicial workload, and fewer support staff. If judicial workload continues to exceed capacity and the judicial need deficit is not addressed, likely consequences may be case processing delays, less time devoted to dispositions, and potentially diminished access to the courts.

In a December 2016 opinion, the Florida Supreme Court certified the need for 6 additional judges: four circuit judges and two county court judges. However, the Florida Legislature did not approve funding for any new judgeships this year ([take this link to the opinion](#)).

Circuit

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2008	44	19	0	0%	599
2009	35	29	0	0%	599
2010	40	37	0	0%	599
2011	40	26	0	0%	599
2012	31	23	0	0%	599
2013	27	16	0	0%	599
2014	24	7	0	0%	599
2015	15	3	0	0%	599
2016	13	1	0	0%	599
2017	13	4	0	0%	599

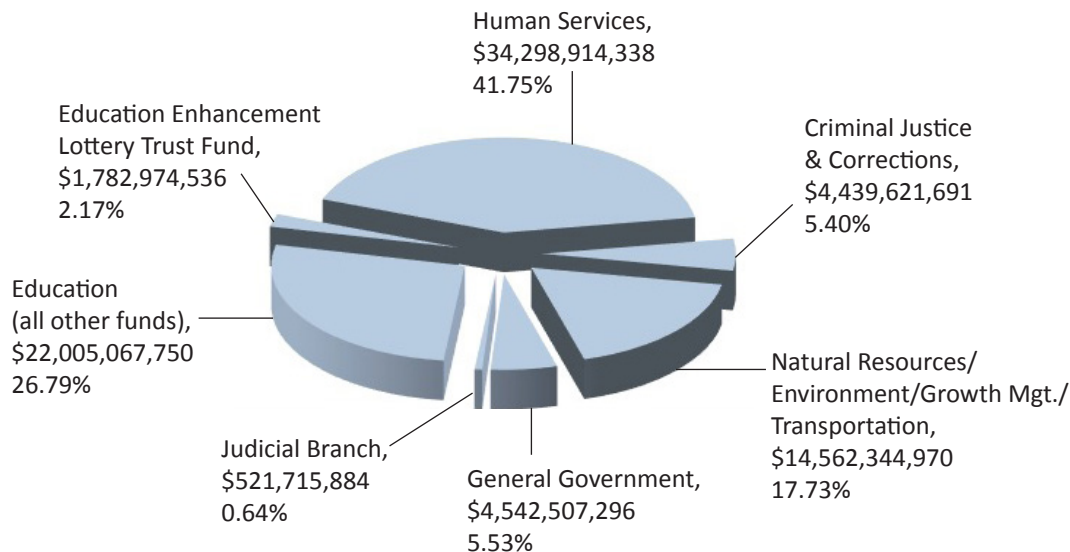
County

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2008	46	42	0	0%	322
2009	61	39	0	0%	322
2010	54	53	0	0%	322
2011	55	54	0	0%	322
2012	49	48	0	0%	322
2013	49	47	0	0%	322
2014	42	39	0	0%	322
2015	36	32	0	0%	322
2016	26	23	0	0%	322
2017	9	2	0	0%	322

FLORIDA'S BUDGET

2016-2017 Fiscal Year State Appropriations

(For an accessible version of the FY 2016 - 2017 and the FY 2017 - 2018 budget, please follow this link)

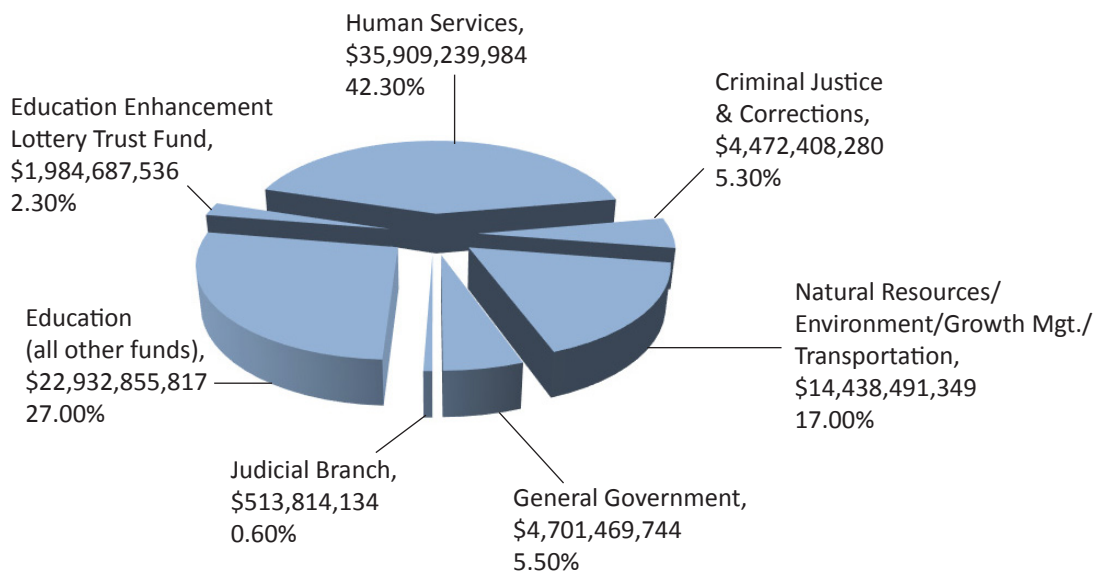


Total State Appropriations: \$82,153,146,465

Note: This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, HB 5001, less vetoes.

Florida's courts receive less than 1% of the state's total budget

2017-2018 Fiscal Year State Appropriations



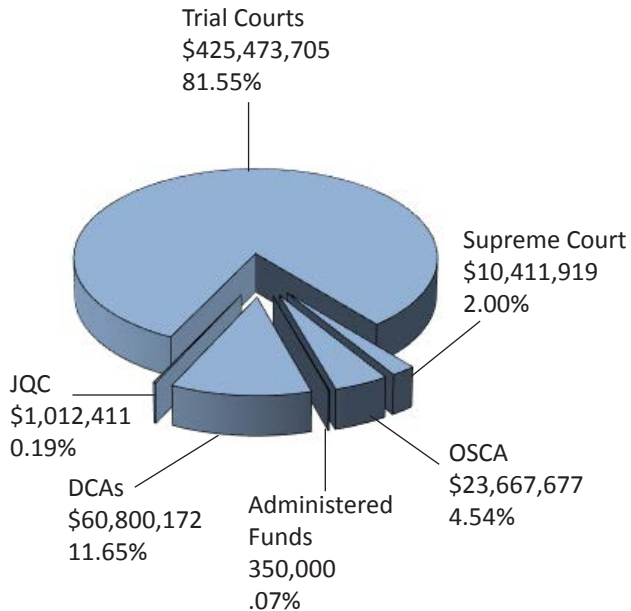
Total State Appropriations: \$84,952,966,844

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 2500, plus Special Session 2017A, less vetoes.

STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS

2016-2017 Fiscal Year State Courts System Appropriations

(For an accessible version of the FY 2016 - 2017 and the FY 2017 - 2018 appropriations, please follow [this link](#))



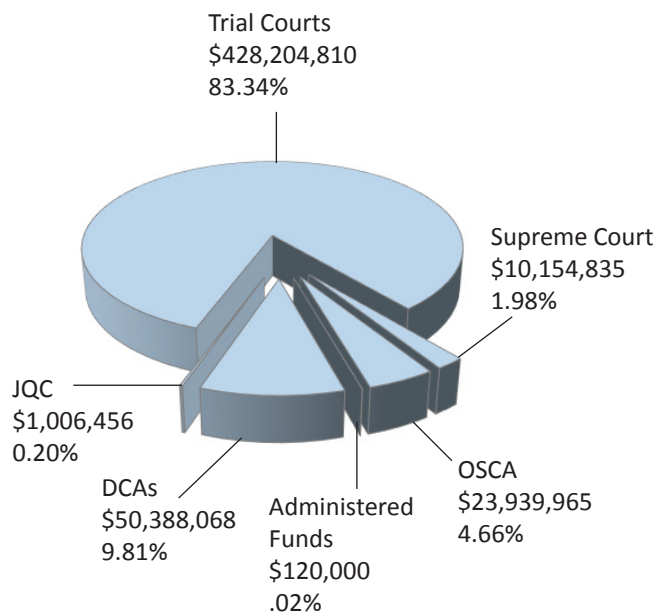
State Courts System Total: \$521,715,884

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, HB 5001, less vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$20.4 million for pass through/ legislative project funding, i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts; \$19.2 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$2.8 million for legislatively approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2016-17 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Justice System Appropriations

State Courts System	\$521,715,884
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$107,881,933
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$46,389,876
State Attorneys	\$442,336,421
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$222,920,323
Public Defenders Appellate	\$16,664,775
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$10,366,861
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$43,141,998
Total	\$1,411,418,071

2017-2018 Fiscal Year State Courts System Appropriations



State Courts System Total: \$513,814,134

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 2500, less vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$20.2 million for pass through/ legislative project funding, i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts; \$7.7 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$5.8 million for legislatively approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2017-18 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Justice System Appropriations

State Courts System	\$513,814,134
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$109,410,569
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$47,138,035
State Attorneys	\$441,085
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$215,673,365
Public Defenders Appellate	\$16,213,640
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$10,548,212
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$44,142,422
Total	\$957,381,462

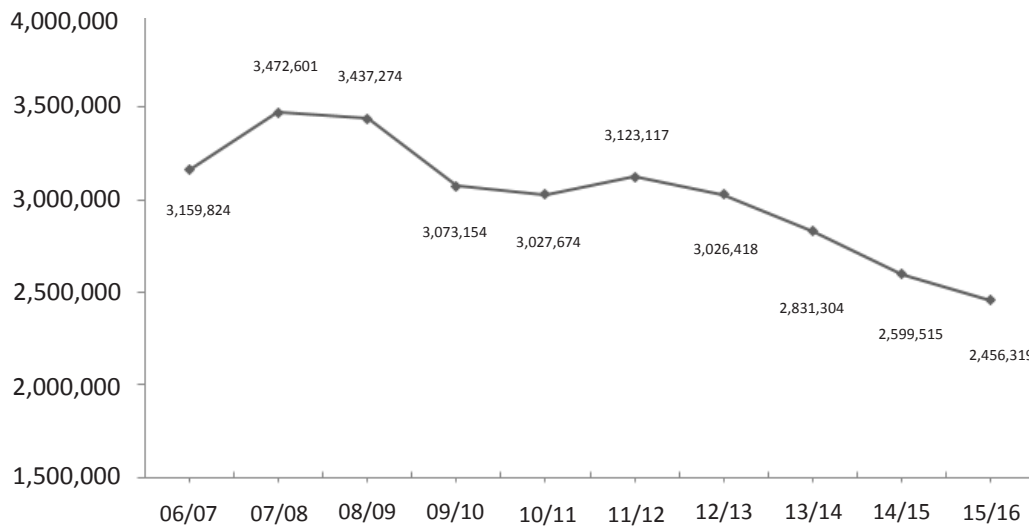
FILINGS

Filings, Florida's Trial Courts FY 2006 - 2007 to FY 2015 - 2016

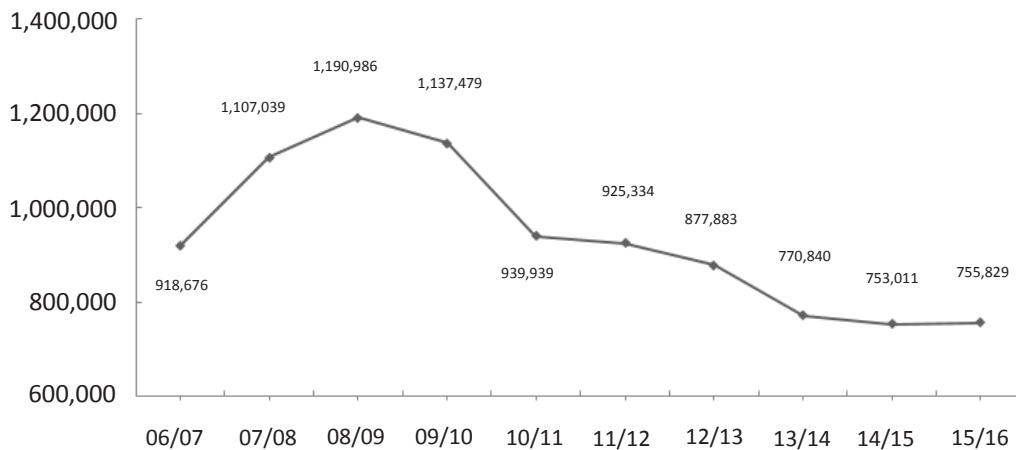
[\(For an accessible version of these filings, follow this link\)](#)

One of the highest priorities of the Office of the State Courts Administrator is to provide a timely and accurate accounting of judicial branch statistics. [From this link, readers may access additional statistical information about Florida's courts](#)

County Courts



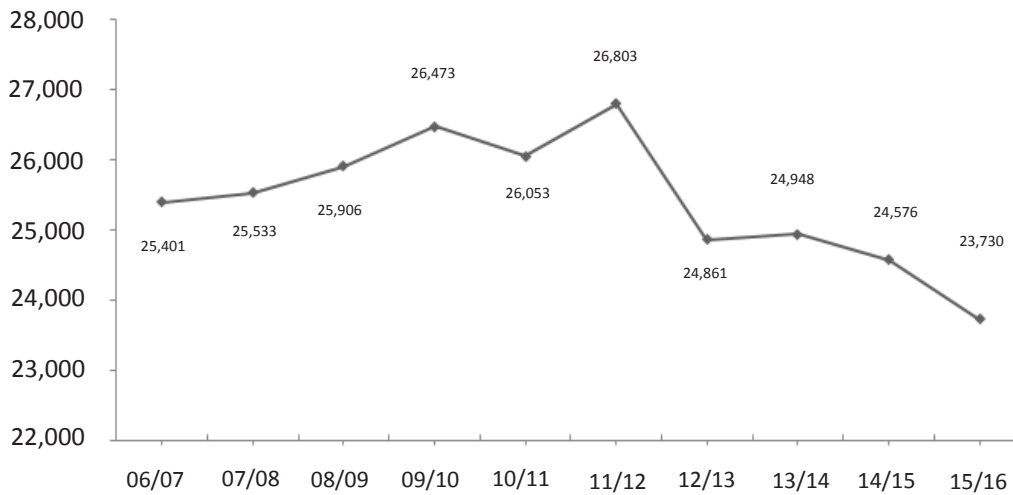
Circuit Courts



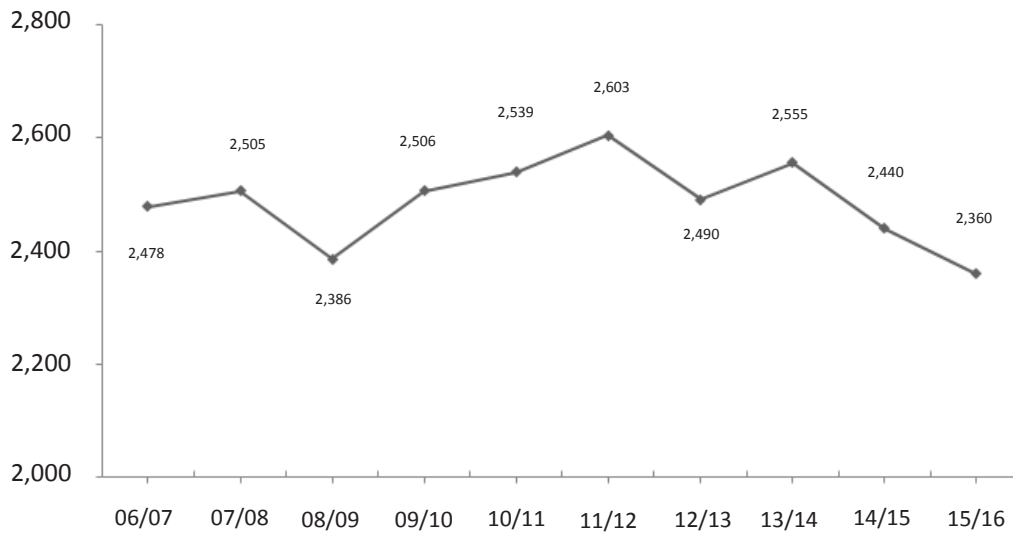
FILINGS

Filings, Florida's Appellate Courts FY 2006 - 2007 to FY 2015 - 2016

District Courts



Supreme Court



[For caseload statistics for the Florida Supreme Court's annual filings and dispositions for 2000 - 2016, please follow this link](#)

DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY, Notice of Appeal and Petition FY 2015 - 2016

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
All	Administrative	1,090
All	Civil	6,289
All	Criminal	8,578
All	Criminal Post Conviction*	4,898
All	Family	1,327
All	Juvenile	1,106
All	Probate/Guardianship	246
All	Workers' Compensation	196
		23,730

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
1	Administrative	671	3	Administrative	101	5	Administrative	87
	Civil	1,100		Civil	1,245		Civil	924
	Criminal	2,390		Criminal	700		Criminal	1,881
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,108		Criminal Post Conviction*	558		Criminal Post Conviction*	1,106
	Family	232		Family	208		Family	291
	Juvenile	185		Juvenile	163		Juvenile	156
	Probate/Guardianship	23		Probate/Guardianship	46		Probate/Guardianship	38
	Workers' Compensation	196			3,021			4,483
		5,905						
						Total		23,730
2	Administrative	121	4	Administrative	110			
	Civil	1,506		Civil	1,514			
	Criminal	2,090		Criminal	1,517			
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,387		Criminal Post Conviction*	739			
	Family	250		Family	346			
	Juvenile	346		Juvenile	256			
	Probate/Guardianship	49		Probate/Guardianship	90			
		5,749			4,572			

* Criminal post conviction filings include notice of appeal only.

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2015 - 2016

Circuit	County	Division	Total Filings
All	All	Adult Criminal	171,670
All	All	Civil	176,740
All	All	Family Court*	288,430
All	All	Probate	118,989
All	All	County Adult Criminal	599,949
All	All	County Civil**	1,856,370
Total			3,212,148

* Family court filings include domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, and termination of parental rights.

** These data do not include all civil traffic infractions reported to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; they represent only those civil traffic infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2015 - 2016

Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings
1	Adult Criminal	10,623	8	Adult Criminal	3,956	15	Adult Criminal	8,663
	Civil	5,013		Civil	2,242		Civil	13,866
	Family Court*	12,224		Family Court*	5,236		Family Court*	14,491
	Probate	5,101		Probate	2,855		Probate	8,433
	County Adult Criminal	24,285		County Adult Criminal	12,496		County Adult Criminal	54,586
	County Civil**	25,771		County Civil**	25,611		County Civil**	150,250
		83,017			52,396			250,289
2	Adult Criminal	4,788	9	Adult Criminal	13,280	16	Adult Criminal	1,075
	Civil	3,830		Civil	14,564		Civil	803
	Family Court*	6,305		Family Court*	26,415		Family Court*	1,383
	Probate	3,101		Probate	7,044		Probate	494
	County Adult Criminal	10,281		County Adult Criminal	43,905		County Adult Criminal	3,495
	County Civil**	21,807		County Civil**	120,887		County Civil**	7,799
		50,112			226,095			15,049
3	Adult Criminal	2,650	10	Adult Criminal	9,177	17	Adult Criminal	14,269
	Civil	1,686		Civil	5,083		Civil	22,552
	Family Court*	3,610		Family Court*	15,632		Family Court*	27,477
	Probate	1,258		Probate	5,256		Probate	8,599
	County Adult Criminal	5,480		County Adult Criminal	22,275		County Adult Criminal	37,719
	County Civil**	12,833		County Civil**	32,069		County Civil**	257,013
		27,517			89,492			367,629
4	Adult Criminal	8,741	11	Adult Criminal	14,640	18	Adult Criminal	8,481
	Civil	9,307		Civil	32,207		Civil	7,090
	Family Court*	18,815		Family Court*	33,404		Family Court*	12,747
	Probate	5,350		Probate	12,280		Probate	5,501
	County Adult Criminal	41,757		County Adult Criminal	80,131		County Adult Criminal	28,941
	County Civil**	135,598		County Civil**	593,559		County Civil**	62,711
		219,568			766,221			125,471
5	Adult Criminal	9,294	12	Adult Criminal	6,335	19	Adult Criminal	5,546
	Civil	7,839		Civil	4,708		Civil	5,269
	Family Court*	15,735		Family Court*	9,217		Family Court*	8,010
	Probate	8,015		Probate	6,785		Probate	4,135
	County Adult Criminal	20,590		County Adult Criminal	18,980		County Adult Criminal	17,876
	County Civil**	42,804		County Civil**	35,839		County Civil**	34,297
		104,277			81,864			75,133
6	Adult Criminal	14,949	13	Adult Criminal	12,999	20	Adult Criminal	8,135
	Civil	12,111		Civil	11,378		Civil	8,288
	Family Court*	20,376		Family Court*	22,339		Family Court*	16,516
	Probate	9,888		Probate	8,150		Probate	8,601
	County Adult Criminal	46,429		County Adult Criminal	43,883		County Adult Criminal	37,987
	County Civil**	68,390		County Civil**	94,228		County Civil**	68,387
		172,143			192,977			147,914
7	Adult Criminal	8,590	14	Adult Criminal	5,479	Total		3,212,148
	Civil	6,647		Civil	2,257			
	Family Court*	12,809		Family Court*	5,689			
	Probate	6,199		Probate	1,944			
	County Adult Criminal	35,189		County Adult Criminal	13,664			
	County Civil**	54,209		County Civil**	12,308			
		123,643			41,341			

* Family court filings include domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, and termination of parental rights.

** These data do not include all civil traffic infractions reported to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; they represent only those civil traffic infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION, FY 2015 - 2016

<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>	<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>	<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>
1 Escambia	Adult Criminal	5,380	2 Leon	Adult Criminal	3,190	3 Madison	Adult Criminal	359
	Civil	2,023		Civil	3,041		Civil	248
	Family Court*	5,608		Family Court*	4,441		Family Court*	317
	Probate	2,817		Probate	2,259		Probate	143
	County Adult Criminal	10,220		County Adult Criminal	6,958		County Adult Criminal	610
	County Civil**	8,822		County Civil**	14,973		County Civil**	3,396
		34,870			34,862			5,073
1 Okaloosa	Adult Criminal	2,727	2 Liberty	Adult Criminal	109	3 Suwannee	Adult Criminal	575
	Civil	1,349		Civil	31		Civil	272
	Family Court*	3,407		Family Court*	162		Family Court*	831
	Probate	1,256		Probate	41		Probate	273
	County Adult Criminal	6,734		County Adult Criminal	247		County Adult Criminal	906
	County Civil**	6,707		County Civil**	295		County Civil**	1,351
		22,180			885			4,208
1 Santa Rosa	Adult Criminal	1,690	2 Wakulla	Adult Criminal	294	3 Taylor	Adult Criminal	364
	Civil	1,057		Civil	216		Civil	135
	Family Court*	2,225		Family Court*	560		Family Court*	445
	Probate	689		Probate	117		Probate	173
	County Adult Criminal	4,754		County Adult Criminal	685		County Adult Criminal	749
	County Civil**	7,951		County Civil**	1,482		County Civil**	835
		18,366			3,354			2,701
1 Walton	Adult Criminal	826	3 Columbia	Adult Criminal	896	4 Clay	Adult Criminal	1,471
	Civil	584		Civil	474		Civil	1,280
	Family Court*	984		Family Court*	1,276		Family Court*	2,845
	Probate	339		Probate	477		Probate	557
	County Adult Criminal	2,577		County Adult Criminal	2,245		County Adult Criminal	4,343
	County Civil**	2,291		County Civil**	4,320		County Civil**	12,112
		7,601			9,688			22,608
2 Franklin	Adult Criminal	255	3 Dixie	Adult Criminal	148	4 Duval	Adult Criminal	6,685
	Civil	89		Civil	81		Civil	7,558
	Family Court*	248		Family Court*	328		Family Court*	14,800
	Probate	100		Probate	88		Probate	4,435
	County Adult Criminal	876		County Adult Criminal	370		County Adult Criminal	35,052
	County Civil**	456		County Civil**	902		County Civil**	120,012
		2,024			1,917			188,542
2 Gadsden	Adult Criminal	700	3 Hamilton	Adult Criminal	257	4 Nassau	Adult Criminal	585
	Civil	356		Civil	437		Civil	469
	Family Court*	716		Family Court*	300		Family Court*	1,170
	Probate	511		Probate	70		Probate	358
	County Adult Criminal	1,191		County Adult Criminal	491		County Adult Criminal	2,362
	County Civil**	3,380		County Civil**	1,681		County Civil**	3,474
		6,854			3,236			8,418
2 Jefferson	Adult Criminal	240	3 Lafayette	Adult Criminal	51	5 Citrus	Adult Criminal	965
	Civil	97		Civil	39		Civil	1,050
	Family Court*	178		Family Court*	113		Family Court*	2,028
	Probate	73		Probate	34		Probate	930
	County Adult Criminal	324		County Adult Criminal	109		County Adult Criminal	1,787
	County Civil**	1,221		County Civil**	348		County Civil**	3,255
		2,133			694			10,015

* Family court filings include domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, and termination of parental rights.

** These data do not include all civil traffic infractions reported to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; they represent only those civil traffic infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County		Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County		Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County		Division	Total Filings
5	Hernando	Adult Criminal	1,960	7	St. Johns	Adult Criminal	1,273	9	Orange	Adult Criminal	10,159
		Civil	1,542			Civil	1,455			Civil	11,229
		Family Court*	3,088			Family Court*	2,329			Family Court*	21,351
		Probate	2,091			Probate	1,084			Probate	5,638
		County Adult Criminal	4,021			County Adult Criminal	4,886			County Adult Criminal	36,256
		County Civil**	10,074			County Civil**	8,175			County Civil**	96,082
			22,776				19,202				180,715
5	Lake	Adult Criminal	2,996	7	Volusia	Adult Criminal	5,758	9	Osceola	Adult Criminal	3,121
		Civil	2,227			Civil	3,958			Civil	3,335
		Family Court*	3,947			Family Court*	7,846			Family Court*	5,064
		Probate	1,934			Probate	4,123			Probate	1,406
		County Adult Criminal	6,374			County Adult Criminal	24,667			County Adult Criminal	7,649
		County Civil**	15,753			County Civil**	42,572			County Civil**	24,805
			33,231				88,924				45,380
5	Marion	Adult Criminal	2,629	8	Alachua	Adult Criminal	2,315	10	Hardee	Adult Criminal	324
		Civil	2,560			Civil	1,379			Civil	136
		Family Court*	5,975			Family Court*	3,125			Family Court*	386
		Probate	2,512			Probate	2,149			Probate	118
		County Adult Criminal	6,586			County Adult Criminal	8,323			County Adult Criminal	1,032
		County Civil**	10,033			County Civil**	18,861			County Civil**	3,205
			30,295				36,152				5,201
5	Sumter	Adult Criminal	744	8	Baker	Adult Criminal	378	10	Highlands	Adult Criminal	970
		Civil	460			Civil	162			Civil	600
		Family Court*	697			Family Court*	446			Family Court*	1,286
		Probate	548			Probate	233			Probate	934
		County Adult Criminal	1,822			County Adult Criminal	1,132			County Adult Criminal	2,063
		County Civil**	3,689			County Civil**	1,376			County Civil**	3,112
			7,960				3,727				8,965
6	Pasco	Adult Criminal	4,514	8	Bradford	Adult Criminal	530	10	Polk	Adult Criminal	7,883
		Civil	4,121			Civil	228			Civil	4,347
		Family Court*	6,550			Family Court*	490			Family Court*	13,960
		Probate	3,194			Probate	97			Probate	4,204
		County Adult Criminal	11,204			County Adult Criminal	1,220			County Adult Criminal	19,180
		County Civil**	20,105			County Civil**	2,679			County Civil**	25,752
			49,688				5,244				75,326
6	Pinellas	Adult Criminal	10,435	8	Gilchrist	Adult Criminal	156	11	Miami-Dade	Adult Criminal	14,640
		Civil	7,990			Civil	84			Civil	32,207
		Family Court*	13,826			Family Court*	351			Family Court*	33,404
		Probate	6,694			Probate	79			Probate	12,280
		County Adult Criminal	35,225			County Adult Criminal	395			County Adult Criminal	80,131
		County Civil**	48,285			County Civil**	522			County Civil**	593,559
			122,455				1,587				766,221
7	Flagler	Adult Criminal	458	8	Levy	Adult Criminal	473	12	Desoto	Adult Criminal	479
		Civil	740			Civil	266			Civil	142
		Family Court*	1,207			Family Court*	618			Family Court*	597
		Probate	535			Probate	178			Probate	152
		County Adult Criminal	3,149			County Adult Criminal	1,213			County Adult Criminal	907
		County Civil**	1,099			County Civil**	1,653			County Civil**	1,072
			7,188				4,401				3,349
7	Putnam	Adult Criminal	1,101	8	Union	Adult Criminal	104	12	Manatee	Adult Criminal	2,800
		Civil	494			Civil	123			Civil	1,993
		Family Court*	1,427			Family Court*	206			Family Court*	4,672
		Probate	457			Probate	119			Probate	2,002
		County Adult Criminal	2,487			County Adult Criminal	213			County Adult Criminal	8,313
		County Civil**	2,363			County Civil**	520			County Civil**	10,524
			8,329				1,285				30,304

* Family court filings include domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, and termination of parental rights.

** These data do not include all civil traffic infractions reported to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles; they represent only those civil traffic infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>
12 Sarasota	Adult Criminal	3,056
	Civil	2,573
	Family Court*	3,948
	Probate	4,631
	County Adult Criminal	9,760
	County Civil**	24,243
		48,211
13 Hillsborough	Adult Criminal	12,999
	Civil	11,378
	Family Court*	22,339
	Probate	8,150
	County Adult Criminal	43,883
	County Civil**	94,228
		192,977
14 Bay	Adult Criminal	3,740
	Civil	1,492
	Family Court*	3,418
	Probate	1,126
	County Adult Criminal	10,889
	County Civil**	8,332
		28,997
14 Calhoun	Adult Criminal	224
	Civil	63
	Family Court*	358
	Probate	90
	County Adult Criminal	212
	County Civil**	536
		1,483
14 Gulf	Adult Criminal	214
	Civil	112
	Family Court*	233
	Probate	120
	County Adult Criminal	419
	County Civil**	314
		1,412
14 Holmes	Adult Criminal	434
	Civil	74
	Family Court*	320
	Probate	126
	County Adult Criminal	531
	County Civil**	506
		1,991
14 Jackson	Adult Criminal	589
	Civil	292
	Family Court*	989
	Probate	364
	County Adult Criminal	956
	County Civil**	2,028
		5,218
14 Washington	Adult Criminal	278
	Civil	224
	Family Court*	371
	Probate	118
	County Adult Criminal	657
	County Civil**	592
		2,240

<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>
15 Palm Beach	Adult Criminal	8,663
	Civil	13,866
	Family Court*	14,491
	Probate	8,433
	County Adult Criminal	54,586
	County Civil**	150,250
		250,289
16 Monroe	Adult Criminal	1,075
	Civil	803
	Family Court*	1,383
	Probate	494
	County Adult Criminal	3,495
	County Civil**	7,799
		15,049
17 Broward	Adult Criminal	14,269
	Civil	22,552
	Family Court*	27,477
	Probate	8,599
	County Adult Criminal	37,719
	County Civil**	257,013
		367,629
18 Brevard	Adult Criminal	5,401
	Civil	3,972
	Family Court*	7,428
	Probate	3,182
	County Adult Criminal	15,530
	County Civil**	21,429
		56,942
18 Seminole	Adult Criminal	3,080
	Civil	3,118
	Family Court*	5,319
	Probate	2,319
	County Adult Criminal	13,411
	County Civil**	41,282
		68,529
19 Indian River	Adult Criminal	1,209
	Civil	963
	Family Court*	1,692
	Probate	979
	County Adult Criminal	3,263
	County Civil**	6,580
		14,686
19 Martin	Adult Criminal	1,240
	Civil	1,486
	Family Court*	1,715
	Probate	818
	County Adult Criminal	5,639
	County Civil**	9,086
		19,984

<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>
19 Okeechobee	Adult Criminal	666
	Civil	524
	Family Court*	785
	Probate	186
	County Adult Criminal	1,443
	County Civil**	1,555
		5,159
19 St. Lucie	Adult Criminal	2,431
	Civil	2,296
	Family Court*	3,818
	Probate	2,152
	County Adult Criminal	7,531
	County Civil**	17,076
		35,304
20 Charlotte	Adult Criminal	1,335
	Civil	1,224
	Family Court*	2,408
	Probate	1,954
	County Adult Criminal	4,466
	County Civil**	6,142
		17,529
20 Collier	Adult Criminal	1,501
	Civil	2,205
	Family Court*	3,308
	Probate	2,259
	County Adult Criminal	9,200
	County Civil**	16,078
		34,551
20 Glades	Adult Criminal	152
	Civil	72
	Family Court*	149
	Probate	45
	County Adult Criminal	439
	County Civil**	1,882
		2,739
20 Hendry	Adult Criminal	583
	Civil	182
	Family Court*	593
	Probate	99
	County Adult Criminal	2,248
	County Civil**	2,688
		6,393
20 Lee	Adult Criminal	4,564
	Civil	4,605
	Family Court*	10,058
	Probate	4,244
	County Adult Criminal	21,634
	County Civil**	41,597
		86,702

* Family court filings include domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, and termination of parental rights.

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COURT CONTACTS FOR 2018

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

Chief Justice JORGE LABARGA (850) 413-8371
 Clerk John A. Tomasino (850) 922-5468
 Marshal Silvester Dawson (850) 922-6204
 State Courts Administrator PK Jameson (850) 922-5081
 Website <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org>

DISTRICT COURTS OF APPEAL

1st DCA

Chief Judge L. BRADFORD L. THOMAS (850) 717-8205
 Clerk Kristina Samuels (850) 717-8100
 Marshal Kevin Taylor (850) 717-8130
 Website <http://www.1dca.org>

2nd DCA

Chief Judge EDWARD C. LAROSE (813) 272-8607
 Clerk Mary Beth Kuenzel (863) 940-6060
 Marshal Jo Haynes (863) 940-6040
 Website <http://www.2dca.org>

3rd DCA

Chief Judge LESLIE ROTHENBERG (305) 229-3200
 Clerk Mary Cay Blanks (305) 229-3200
 Marshal Veronica Antonoff (305) 229-3200
 Website <http://www.3dca.flcourts.org>

4th DCA

Chief Judge JONATHAN D. GERBER (561) 242-2053
 Clerk Lonn Weissblum (561) 242-2000
 Marshal Daniel DiGiacomo (561) 242-2000
 Website <http://www.4dca.org>

5th DCA

Chief Judge JAY P. COHEN (386) 947-1570
 Clerk Joanne P. Simmons (386) 947-1557
 Marshal Charles Crawford (386) 947-1544
 Website <http://www.5dca.org>

CIRCUIT COURTS

1st Judicial Circuit

Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties
Chief Judge LINDA L. NOBLES (850) 595-4459
 Court Administrator Robin Wright (850) 595-4400
 Website <http://www.firstjudicialcircuit.org>

2nd Judicial Circuit

Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla counties
Chief Judge JONATHAN SJOSTROM (850) 606-4321
 Court Administrator Grant Slayden (850) 606-4422
 Website <http://www.leoncountyfl.gov/2ndCircuit/>

3rd Judicial Circuit

Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor counties
Chief Judge WESLEY R. DOUGLAS (386) 758-1010
 Court Administrator Sondra Lanier (386) 758-2163
 Website <http://www.jud3.flcourts.org>

4th Judicial Circuit

Clay, Duval, and Nassau counties
Chief Judge MARK MAHON (904) 255-1228
 Court Administrator Joseph G. Stelma, Jr. (904) 255-1155
 Website <http://www.jud4.org/>

5th Judicial Circuit

Hernando, Citrus, Lake, Marion, and Sumter counties
Chief Judge S. SUE ROBBINS (352) 401-7820
 Court Administrator Jon Lin (352) 401-6707
 Website <http://www.circuit5.org>

6th Judicial Circuit

Pasco and Pinellas counties
Chief Judge ANTHONY RONDOLINO (727) 582-7272
 Court Administrator Gay Inskeep (727) 582-7511
 Website <http://www.jud6.org>

7th Judicial Circuit

Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, and Volusia counties
Chief Judge RAUL A. ZAMBRANO (386) 943-7060
 Court Administrator Mark Weinberg (386) 257-6097
 Website <http://www.circuit7.org>

8th Judicial Circuit

Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Union counties
Chief Judge TOBY S. MONACO (352) 374-3641
 Court Administrator Paul Silverman (352) 374-3638
 Website <http://www.circuit8.org>

9th Judicial Circuit

Orange and Osceola counties
Chief Judge FREDERICK J. LAUTEN (407) 836-2009
 Court Administrator Matthew Benefiel (407) 836-2051
 Website <http://www.ninthcircuit.org/>

10th Judicial Circuit

Hardee, Highlands, and Polk counties
Chief Judge DONALD G. JACOBSEN (863) 534-4649
 Court Administrator Nick Sudzina (863) 534-4686
 Website <http://www.jud10.flcourts.org/>

11th Judicial Circuit

Miami-Dade County
Chief Judge BERTILA SOTO (305) 349-5720
 Court Administrator Sandra Lonergan (305) 349-7000
 Website <http://www.jud11.flcourts.org>

12th Judicial Circuit

DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties
Chief Judge CHARLES E. WILLIAMS (941) 861-7942
 Court Administrator Walt Smith (941) 861-7800
 Website <http://www.jud12.flcourts.org/>

COURT CONTACTS FOR 2018

13th Judicial Circuit

Hillsborough County

Chief Judge RONALD N. FICARROTTA (813) 272-6797

Court Administrator Gina Justice (813) 272-5369

Website <http://www.fljud13.org/>

14th Judicial Circuit

Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, and Washington counties

Chief Judge ELIJAH SMILEY (850) 767-3341

Court Administrator Robyn Gable (850) 747-5370

Website <http://www.jud14.flcourts.org>

15th Judicial Circuit

Palm Beach County

Chief Judge Krista Marx (561) 355-7814

Court Administrator Barbara L. Dawicke (561) 355-1872

Website <http://15thcircuit.co.palm-beach.fl.us/>

16th Judicial Circuit

Monroe County

Chief Judge MARK H. JONES (305) 292-3422

Court Administrator Holly Elomina (305) 295-3644

Website <http://www.keyscourts.net>

17th Judicial Circuit

Broward County

Chief Judge JACK TUTER, JR. (954) 831-7576

Court Administrator Kathleen R. Pugh (954) 831-7741

Website <http://www.17th.flcourts.org>

18th Judicial Circuit

Brevard and Seminole counties

Chief Judge JOHN M. HARRIS (321) 264-7700

Court Administrator Mark Van Bever (321) 633-2171

Website <http://www.flcourts18.org>

19th Judicial Circuit

Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties

Chief Judge ELIZABETH A. METZGER (772) 288-5560

Court Administrator Tom Genung (772) 807-4370

Website <http://www.circuit19.org>

20th Judicial Circuit

Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties

Chief Judge MICHAEL T. M^CHUGH (239) 533-2775

Court Administrator Scott A. Wilsker (239) 533-1712

Website <http://www.ca.cjis20.org/home/main/homepage.asp>

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Deputy State Courts Administrator

Blan L. Teagle (850) 413-0268

Deputy State Courts Administrator

Eric Maclure (850) 488-3733

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Dorothy Willard, Chief (850) 488-3735

Court Education & Improvement

Rose Patterson, Chief (850) 922-5079

Court Services

Arlene Johnson, Chief (850) 922-5094

Dispute Resolution Center

Susan Marvin, Chief (850) 921-2910

Finance & Accounting

Jackie Knight, Chief (850) 487-7980

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Thomas "Tad" David (850) 922-5109

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Steven Hall, Chief (850) 410-5300

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Beatriz Caballero, Chief (850) 487-0778

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Roosevelt Sawyer, Jr. (850) 487-7986

Technology Officer

Innovations and Outreach

Tina White, Chief (850) 487-9999

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