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 served as chief justice from 2014 – 2018.

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 Labarga, 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 11 grandchildren. Having reached the mandatory retirement age for judges and justices, Justice Pariente left the bench in January 2019.
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 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, Judy Lewis, have two children, Elle and Lindsay. Having reached the mandatory retirement age for judges and justices, Justice Lewis left the bench in January 2019.

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 1993, 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. Having reached the mandatory retirement age for judges and justices, Justice Quince left the bench in January 2019.
Charles T. Canady  
Justice  

Justice Canady was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in August 2008. He served as chief justice from 2010 – 2012 and, as of July 1, 2018, has been serving as chief for a second time.

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, he was appointed 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.

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 bio-sketches of all the supreme court justices, 1846 – present, take this link.
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.
FLORIDA’S NEWEST JUSTICES

A recently adopted constitutional amendment increased to 75 the mandatory retirement age for judges and justices (it will take effect July 1, 2019). Before the passage of this amendment, Florida set the retirement age for jurists at 70, the exact date of their retirement depending on when, in their six-year term, they observed their seventieth birthday. Justice Barbara J. Pariente (appointed to the supreme court bench in December 1997), Justice R. Fred Lewis (appointed in December 1998), and Justice Peggy A. Quince (also appointed in December 1998) reached what jurists jocularly refer to as “constitutional senility” before 2018 came to a close. Therefore, they faced mandatory retirement when their terms expired in January 2019.

Supreme court history buffs might be interested to know that this was the first time in the court’s 172-year history that three justices left the bench at the same time. This was also the first time in more than 100 years that three justices joined the court at the same time: the last time was in 1902, after voters approved a constitutional amendment expanding the court from three to six justices. Below, read about Florida’s newest justices.

Barbara Lagoa
Justice

Justice Lagoa was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court on January 9, 2019.

Born in Miami, Justice Lagoa is the first Cuban-American woman to serve on the court. She received her BA in English from Florida International University and her JD from Columbia University. Before joining the bench, she practiced law both in the civil and criminal arenas. Then in 2003, she joined the US Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Florida; as an assistant US attorney, she worked in the Civil, Major Crimes, and Appellate Sections. In 2006, she was appointed to the Third District Court of Appeal, where she served until her appointment to the Supreme Court.

Justice Lagoa’s civic and community activities include service on the Board of Directors for the YWCA of Greater Miami and Dade County, the Film Society of Miami, Kristi House, and the Florida International University Alumni Association. She is a member of the Eugene P. Spellman and William Hoeveler Chapter of the American Inns of Court.

Justice Lagoa and her husband, Paul C. Huck, Jr., an attorney, have three children.
Robert J. Luck
Justice

Justice Luck was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court on January 14, 2019.

Born and raised in Miami-Dade County, Justice Luck received his BA in Economics from the University of Florida and his JD from the University of Florida Levin College of Law. Prior to his service on the bench, he was a legislative correspondent for two US senators, a law clerk and staff attorney at the US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, and in private practice. He was also an assistant US attorney for the Southern District of Florida, assigned to the Appeals, Major Crimes, and Economic Crimes Sections.

In 2013, he was appointed a circuit judge in Florida’s Eleventh Judicial Circuit, where he presided in the Criminal, Civil, and Appellate Divisions. Then in 2017, he was appointed to the Third District Court of Appeal, where he served until his appointment to the Supreme Court.

Carlos G. Muñiz
Justice

Justice Muñiz was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court on January 22, 2019.

Justice Muñiz received his undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia and his JD from Yale Law School. After graduating, he clerked at the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and at the US District Court for the District of Columbia.

He first moved to Florida in 2001 to serve as a deputy general counsel in the Governor’s Office; subsequently, he served as deputy chief of staff and counsel in the Office of the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and as general counsel of the Florida Department of Financial Services. He also served as the deputy attorney general and chief of staff to the Florida Attorney General, where he managed a 400-lawyer staff and oversaw duties that included enforcement and litigation, legislative affairs, and communications. Most recently, he led the Office of the General Counsel for the US Department of Education, providing legal and policy advice to the US Secretary of Education and other senior department officials.
Justices of the Florida Supreme Court. Seated (l – r) are Justice Polston, Chief Justice Canady, and Justice Labarga; standing (l – r) are Justice Luck, Justice Lawson, Justice Lagoa, and Justice Muñiz.