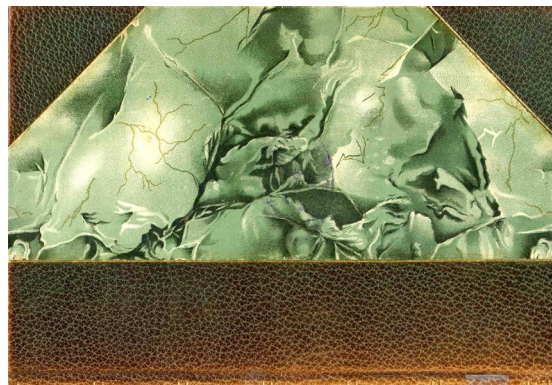
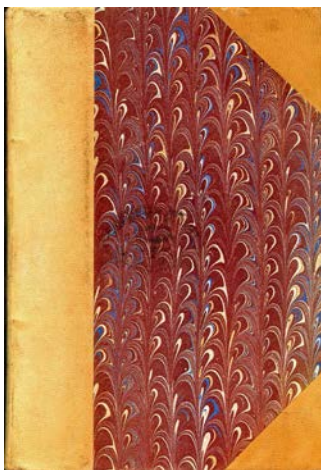
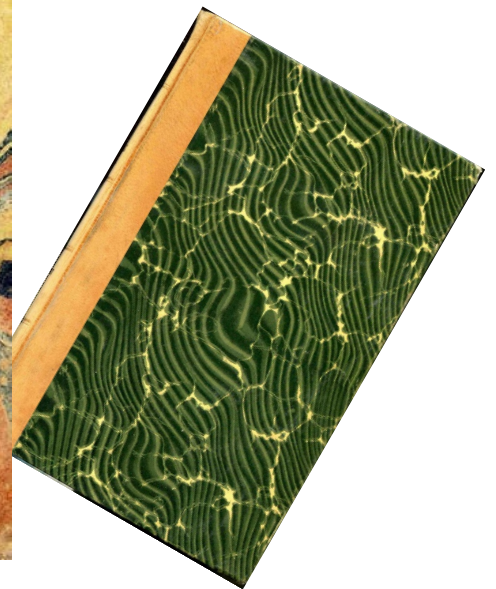
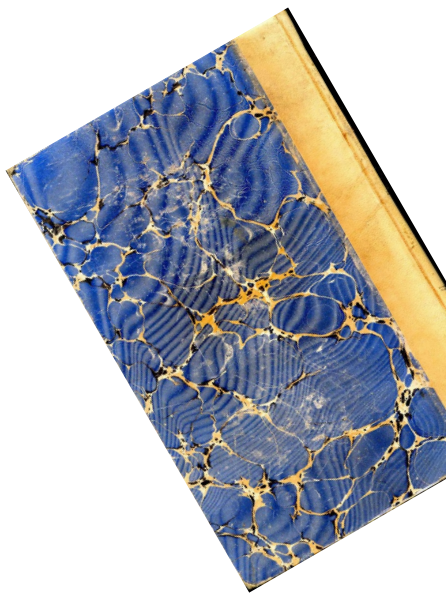
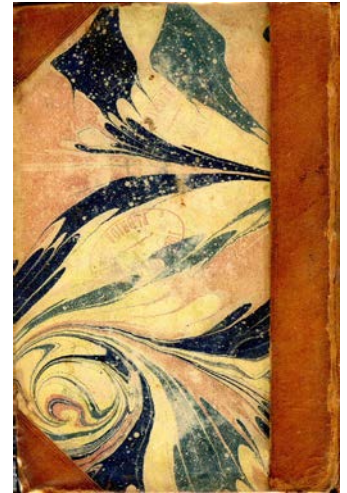
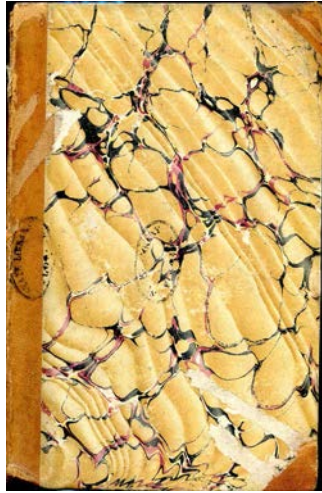


2017-2018

FLORIDA STATE COURTS

Annual Report





These books from the Florida Supreme Court Library's rare book room dazzle the eyes with their marbled paper book bindings. Dating back to the twelfth century, marbleizing is a craft that involves transferring onto absorbent paper or fabric a pattern that is created by floating color on liquid.

The Supreme Court of Florida

Florida State Courts Annual Report

July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018



Jorge Labarga
Chief Justice

Barbara J. Pariente

R. Fred Lewis

Peggy A. Quince

Charles T. Canady

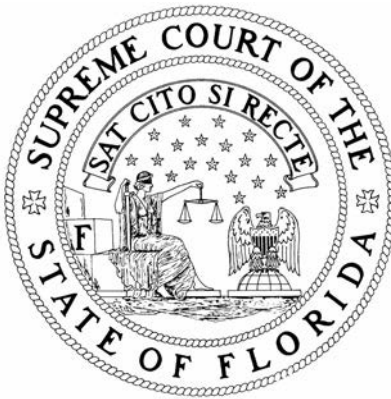
Ricky Polston

C. Alan Lawson

Justices

Patricia “PK” Jameson

State Courts Administrator



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Under the direction of
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State Courts Administrator Patricia “PK” Jameson
Innovations and Outreach Chief Tina White
Written/edited by [Beth C. Schwartz](#), Court Publications Writer

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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

It takes a large group of people with a great range of talents to sustain a healthy, independent, and accountable court system that ensures the rule of law throughout the State. Judges in every county in Florida contribute in significant ways to the judicial branch's successes. So do the court administrators, the marshals, and all the other people who work in our courts. And for the important advances made over the period covered by this report, my predecessor as chief justice, Jorge Labarga, deserves great credit. I encourage you to read this report to learn about some of these accomplishments.

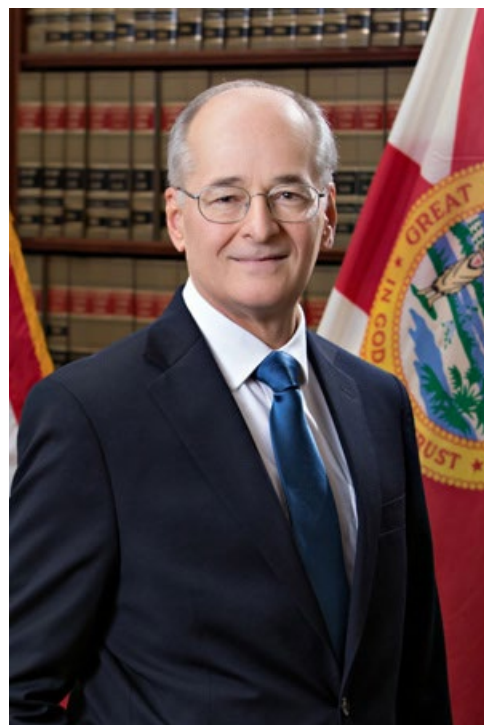
As part of its ongoing effort to improve the administration of justice, the judicial branch is always searching for innovative ways to carry out its mission more effectively and efficiently. One entity that plays an instrumental role in improving the administration of justice is the Judicial Management Council (JMC), which Justice Labarga chaired during his four years as chief justice. This council, which Justice Labarga refers to as "the workhorse of the judicial branch," 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." This report enumerates many of the JMC's achievements under Justice Labarga's direction.

For instance, the JMC updated the branch-wide communication plan, *Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida*. When the communication plan went into effect in January 2016, it became a source of great interest among the leaders of courts throughout the nation. Wherever our justices and staff travel, judges and court administrators from other states ask detailed questions about its development and its implementation.

In response to increases in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings, the council also made great progress in addressing security challenges in our trial courts. It recently recommended, and the supreme court approved, a series of best practices and standards to promote the safety and security of the public, judicial officers, and court personnel in Florida's courts.

Another complex issue on which the JMC focused was guardianship. The council recently made recommendations to address guardianship and guardianship advocacy issues, including suggestions for amending Florida statutes and court rules and for developing guidance on properly handling guardianship cases. At the same time, the Office of the State Courts Administrator received a two-year grant to facilitate Florida's WINGS initiative, a collaboration between the court and other governmental and private guardianship stakeholders, which has been working to map a comprehensive strategy for improved guardianship processes and increased effectiveness.

The JMC has also fixed its attention on access to justice issues. The council is spearheading the Do-It-Yourself Florida project, which guides self-represented litigants and others through a series of web-based interview questions that culminate in the creation of electronic pleadings and other documents suitable for filing. The JMC's access to justice focus aligns with the work of another major enterprise introduced under



MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

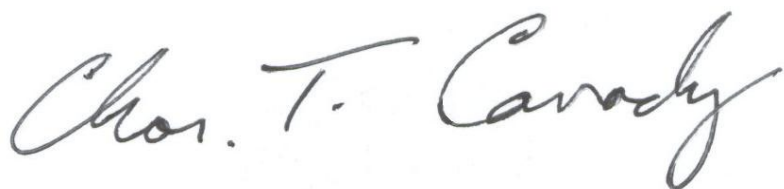
Justice Labarga's leadership, the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice. Among the commission's accomplishments is the development of the Florida Courts Help App, a direct, mobile-friendly pathway for self-represented litigants and others to Florida's most requested court information and forms.

This report also provides an update on our Early Childhood Courts, which encompass child welfare cases involving children under the age of three. Compared to jurisdictions with traditional dependency courts, this problem-solving court has demonstrated more timely permanency outcomes and a reduction of re-abuse. In the last five years, Florida's Early Childhood Courts have grown from three sites to 22, and the implementation of new sites is ongoing.

The report details the advances of other Florida problem-solving courts as well. The supreme court recently approved *Florida Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards*, which clearly define the practices that problem-solving courts should implement to adhere to evidence-based principles that have been scientifically shown to produce better outcomes. Using this as a model, the branch is now developing standards for other problem-solving courts in Florida (e.g., veterans court, juvenile drug court, family dependency drug court, driving under the influence court, and mental health court).

You can also read about the progress the branch is making with Virtual Remote Interpreting. Each year, thousands of court cases in Florida require spoken language interpreters. Utilizing both video and audio components, Virtual Remote Interpreting is a technology-based solution that enables remote interpreters to provide service as if they were in the courtroom, helping to address the increased need for quality interpreting services across the state.

In addition to being able to read about all these undertakings—and more—below, you can also discover how our courts are organized, from your local county court to the Supreme Court of Florida. You can learn about the great variety of court committees that gather input on judicial branch policies affecting the administration of justice. And you can find statistics about the numbers and the types of cases that come into our state courts for resolution. I hope you take time to delve into our annual report, for I believe it will increase your awareness of court programs, services, and performance and give you a better understanding of the purposes, roles, and responsibilities of the judicial branch.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Char. T. Canady". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Char." is followed by a period, and the last name "Canady" is written in a larger, more prominent script.

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Jorge Labarga

Chief Justice, July 2014 – June 2018

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.

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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.

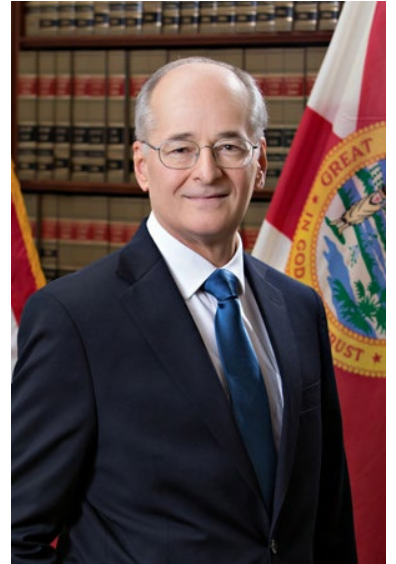
FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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.

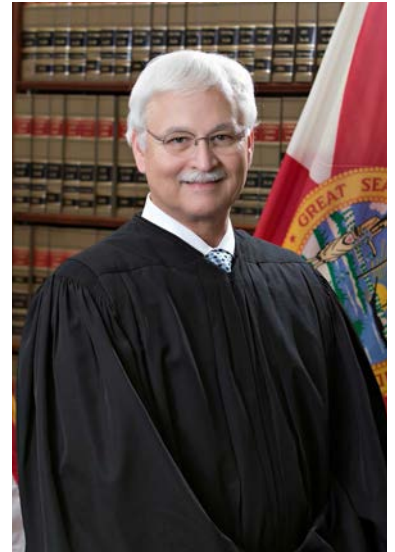
Justice Canady and his wife, Jennifer Houghton, have two children.



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.

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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.](#)

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.

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.



FLORIDA'S NEWEST JUSTICES

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.

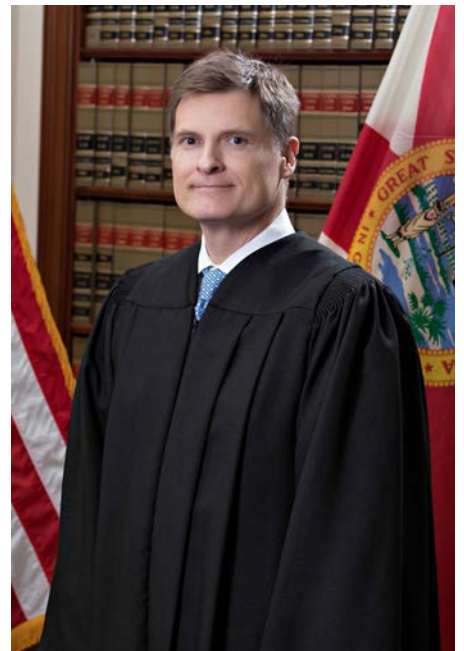


Carlos G. Muñiz Justice

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.



FLORIDA'S NEWEST JUSTICES



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.

July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018: The Year in Review

Studies have consistently found that when people have an understanding of the US justice system and the role of the courts within it, their confidence in and support for the courts are strengthened. Through its development of educational materials and programs, outreach initiatives, publications, enhanced web content, videos, mobile apps, social media networks, and other communication strategies, Florida’s judicial branch has been working to create an array of opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the functions, processes, and accomplishments of their courts. The *Florida State Courts Annual Report* is one of the many resources the branch produces 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 to aspire 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 framework, the annual report aims “to increase public awareness about court programs, services, and performance” and “to educate the public about the purposes, roles, responsibilities, and decisions of the judicial branch by improving outreach efforts” (Goals 1.2 and 1.5 of [Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida](#)). In providing readers with an opportunity to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the third branch of government, this plan endeavors 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 continue working steadfastly to secure sufficient and stable funding for the judiciary, to strengthen the governance and policy development structures of the branch, and to eliminate biased behavior from court operations.

Section Topics:

- State Courts System Funding
- Judicial Management Council
- Performance and Accountability
- Fairness and Diversity Awareness

State Courts System Funding

Historically, Florida’s courts receive less than one percent of the state’s total budget each year. Thus 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 persistent. When courts have outstanding, critical funding needs, judges, staff, and courtrooms are surely affected—but so are the individuals, families, and businesses that depend on the courts to resolve disputes and achieve justice. A lack of sufficient and stable funding for staff, buildings, technology, and other resources, for instance, 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.

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 needed to operate the courts system effectively and efficiently for the benefit of those the judiciary serves.

Funding for the 2017 – 18 Fiscal Year

Leading up to the March 2017 legislative session, state economists, anticipating—and endeavoring to minimize the effects of—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. 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, from its \$84.9 billion budget in fiscal year 2017 – 18, lawmakers appropriated \$513.8 million to the judicial branch. (Note: this figure included \$20.2 million for pass through/legislative project funding.)



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

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 various worthy 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 medication used to treat alcohol- or opioid-addicted individuals.

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](#)).

Funding for the 2018 – 19 Fiscal Year

Even with record-breaking levels of tourism in Florida, state economists, before the start of the 2018 legislative session, warned of imminent revenue shortfalls (the projected budget gap was exacerbated by recovery costs for Hurricane Irma as well as increasing costs for human services, largely Medicaid, and for growth in K-12 enrollment, for instance). As lawmakers began to consider the 2018 – 19 budget, economists emphasized that taking a proactive approach in the coming fiscal year would go a long way toward lessening future fiscal disruptions.

In March 2018, the legislature passed an \$88.7 billion budget for the 2018 – 19 fiscal year (of which the governor vetoed \$64 million). In response to the February 14 Parkland shooting, lawmakers had to partially rewrite the planned budget to accommodate \$400 million for school-safety initiatives (increased funding for mental health services, school resource officers, and security



improvements). The judicial branch portion of the appropriations was \$538.9 million. (Note: this figure included \$20 million for pass through/legislative project funding).

The trial court's top priority did make it into the budget: lawmakers restored the \$2 million cut from the trial court salary budget that was executed in the 2017 – 18 fiscal year budget. No other branch budget requests were funded. Moreover, the legislature did not fund the four new judgeships certified by the supreme court—nor did it decertify the 13 judgeships that the court proposed for elimination. ([This link goes to the November 2017 supreme court opinion, *Certification of Need for Additional Judges*](#)).

However, lawmakers did fund various laudable projects that were not included in the courts system's legislative budget request. These projects included funding for, among other things, electronic transmittal of court alert reminders, medication used to treat alcohol- or opioid-addicted individuals, problem-solving courts, senior judge support, early childhood court program evaluation, and domestic violence GPS monitoring.

In addition, the legislature passed, and the governor signed, a stand-alone bill that addressed the opioid epidemic; in part, the bill appropriated \$6 million in recurring funds to the Office of the State Courts Administrator for treatment of substance abuse disorders in individuals involved in the criminal justice system, individuals who have a high likelihood of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, or individuals who are in court-ordered, community-based drug treatment.

Looking Ahead

According to [The Long-Range Financial Outlook](#) (a constitutionally-required, three-year budget projection issued by the Legislative Budget Commission), lawmakers will likely have a modest surplus to work with during the 2019 – 20 budget cycle. However, the outlook for the two fiscal years after that shows the state's critical expenditure needs outpacing revenues, resulting in a shortfall posture for those years. Despite increased general revenue projections for the coming fiscal year, state economists are recommending that lawmakers budget the surplus with caution, due to the high costs associated with Hurricane Michael recovery and the possibility of a recession, among other issues. [Take this link for more information about current court funding and the branch's budget request for the 2019 – 20 fiscal year.](#)

Judicial Management Council

Judicial Management Councils (JMCs), considered high-level management consultants to the supreme court, have offered guidance and recommendations to the branch since 1953. The current council—the JMC's fifth iteration—was established in November 2012 “as a focused advisory body to assist the chief justice and the Court, as specified in rule 2.225 of the [Florida Rules of Judicial Administration](#).” It was visualized 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.” (For more information about the history and



The Judicial Management Council is chaired by the current chief justice, and membership includes an additional supreme court justice. From 2014 – 2018, then Chief Justice Jorge Labarga (on right) chaired the council, and Justice Ricky Polston (on left) was among the council's 15 voting members.

responsibilities of the branch's JMCs, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

The present JMC was conceived as an agile body capable of responding quickly and resourcefully to challenges facing the branch. This dexterity is achieved through the creation of workgroups that are charged with specific tasks and are dissolved after they complete them. The JMC is now in its fourth two-year term. Of the workgroups established in the JMC's early terms, three have completed their charges and were discharged. The Performance Workgroup reviewed filings 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.

Below is information about the Access to Justice Workgroup, which is still active, and about three workgroups that completed their charges in 2018: the Trial Court Security Workgroup, the Guardianship Workgroup, and the County Court Jurisdiction Workgroup.

Access to Justice Workgroup

The Access to Justice Workgroup, established in 2014 and chaired by Mr. Tom Edwards, concentrates on strategies to facilitate access for self-represented litigants. The workgroup's primary focus has been the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Florida project, which guides self-represented litigants and others through a series of web-based interview questions that culminate in the creation of electronic pleadings and other documents suitable for filing. Under the direction of the workgroup, the Office of the State Courts Administrator has been working with the supreme court's Advisory Committee on Family Law Forms, the clerks of the circuit courts, the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers, Florida Bar committees, Florida Bar staff, and other subject matter experts to develop appropriate question and answer decision logic for interviews in the areas of small claims, landlord/tenant, and family law.

After interviews are completed, they are carefully reviewed to ensure that they protect due process rights, maintain fairness for both sides, and are legally sufficient. They are also subjected to a 15-day test phase (testers include Florida legal aid organizations, judges, court staff, attorneys, and lay people). The interviews are adjusted based on testers' feedback.

Thus far, interviews to assist self-represented litigants in creating petitions, answers, and associated documents have been drafted and programed for more than 112 pleadings in 24 case types. Interviews are now complete for the following: landlord/tenant; small claims; simplified dissolution; dissolution; dissolution with children; dissolution with property, no children; modifications for alimony, child support, and parenting plans; temporary support; temporary custody; paternity and the dis-establishment of paternity; name change for adults, children, and families; step-parent adoption for adults and children; interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, repeat violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking; long and short financial disclosure; parenting plans; marital separation agreements; and the child support guidelines worksheet.

Forms and questions for both sides of a dispute must be completed before interviews are posted. Recently, the landlord/tenant interviews, which include landlord complaint and tenant response, went live and are now available on the courts system's statewide e-filing portal.

DIY Florida is just one of a number of “access to civil justice initiatives” currently supported by the supreme court. To read about others, please see the article on [Access to Civil Justice](#) below.

Trial Court Security Workgroup

Court security is fundamental to the US system of justice. When people go to a courthouse to conduct court business or participate in judicial proceedings, they have a natural expectation of safety. Unfortunately, recent incidents of violence in federal and state courts, resulting in injury and death, have threatened that perception and affected the court’s ability to conduct its business effectively, efficiently, and fairly. The rise in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings spurred the creation of the Trial Court Security Workgroup.

The JMC began discussing the need for a security workgroup in early 2016, after the release of the branch’s current long-range strategic plan: long-range goal 4.1 emphasizes the need to increase protection of all judges, court personnel, court users, and facilities, stressing effective security, emergency preparedness, and continuity of operations plans. The Trial Court Security Workgroup, chaired by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, was formally constituted in August 2016 and directed to examine county courthouse facilities and to evaluate security procedures, practices, and perceptions.



Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, chaired the Trial Court Security Workgroup.

Reflecting input and feedback from judges, court staff, law enforcement professionals, and other security partners, the workgroup’s final report presents 17 recommendations to promote safety and security in Florida’s trial courts. Recommendations address model courthouse security practices, fundamental elements of trial court facility security, training recommendations, security funding practices, statewide incident reporting, and partnership opportunities. After the final report was approved by the supreme court in September 2018, implementation began, shepherded by the branch’s trial court security representatives in concert with the statewide trial court security coordinator.

Guardianship Workgroup

Guardians are surrogate decision-makers who are appointed by the court to manage the personal and/or financial affairs of a person who is legally unable to manage his or her own affairs (e.g., a minor or an adult with a developmental disability, a mental health disability, or an age-related disability) and for whom less restrictive alternatives are found by the court to be inappropriate or unavailable. Although guardianship is not just for elderly people, the rise in Florida’s aging population has significantly intensified the growth in guardianship cases (According to the [US Census Bureau](#), approximately 19.4 percent of the state’s inhabitants are at least 65 years old). The Guardianship Workgroup, formed in October 2016 and chaired by Senior Judge Olin Shinholser, Tenth Circuit, was established to try to address this potential trend and its ramifications.



Senior Judge Olin Shinholser, Tenth Circuit, chaired the Guardianship Workgroup.

The workgroup was tasked with examining judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianships to ensure that courts are best protecting the well-being of people adjudicated to be incapacitated and people alleged to have diminished capacity. The workgroup focused on six issues: 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; and training opportunities available to judges and court staff.

The workgroup's final report, based on feedback from judges, court staff, attorneys, and other guardianship stakeholders, is a culmination of efforts to identify guardianship challenges and includes the workgroup's recommendations to promote the well-being of those alleged or determined to have diminished capacity. Among its 25 recommendations to address guardianship and guardianship advocacy issues, the report includes suggestions for amendments to Florida statutes and to court rules as well as suggestions for developing guidance on properly handling guardianship cases. In June 2018, the recommendations were submitted to the supreme court for consideration and referral, where appropriate, to responsible stakeholders, among them, the Florida Legislature, Florida's chief judges, the Florida Bar Probate Rules Committee, the Department of Elder Affairs, and the Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS). (Read more about the courts system's WINGS initiative in the article on [Guardianship](#) below.)

Work Group on County Court Jurisdiction

The jurisdictional limit for county court cases may not exceed the sum of \$15,000 (exclusive of interest, costs, and attorney's fees)—a limit that has not changed since 1992. Likewise, the jurisdictional limit for small claims cases may not exceed the sum of \$5,000 (exclusive of interest, costs, and attorney's fees)—a limit that has not changed since 1996. To review the county court and small claims jurisdictional limits and to examine the operational issues that would be affected if those limits were adjusted, the supreme court created the [Work Group on County Court Jurisdiction](#) in August 2018 and appointed Judge Robert Morris, Second DCA, to chair it. In November 2018, the workgroup submitted its report and recommendations to the supreme court.



Council members include Judge Robert Morris, Second DCA (on left), who chaired the Work Group on County Court Jurisdiction, and Judge Richard Suarez, Third DCA.

Regarding the county court jurisdictional limit, the work group recommended—and the supreme court supports—raising the limit from \$15,000 to \$25,000, conducting jurisdictional limit reviews regularly, and monitoring the operational impacts of a jurisdictional change (after analyzing operational impacts on workload, attorney representation, types of cases heard, facilities, technology systems, jury trials, court mediation, court education, and additional implications for justice stakeholders, the work group noted that “Concern over these impacts increases as the county court jurisdictional limit increases”).

Regarding appellate operational and structural issues, the work group recommended—and the supreme court supports—that cases appealed with a value between \$15,000 and \$25,000 be adjudicated by the circuit court, allowing no direct appeal to the district courts of appeal except as otherwise provided by law. However, the court stated that further study is needed to determine whether circuit courts should be uniformly required to

hear appeals from the county court in panels and whether other changes in the process for review of county court decisions would be desirable. To this end, under the auspices of the JMC, the supreme court recently established the [Appellate Review of County Court Decisions Workgroup](#), which will submit its findings and recommendations by October 2019.

And, regarding the small claims jurisdictional limit, the work group recommended—and the supreme court will pursue—increasing the limit to \$8,000, conducting jurisdictional limit reviews regularly, and implementing an online dispute resolution pilot program.

In its conclusion, the work group noted that “These recommendations will allow the county courts to expand the jurisdictional limit and small claim limit in a manner that adjusts for the modern-day value of the limits established in 1992 and 1996, respectively. These suggested increases are significant enough to allow more cases to be heard in county court and to increase access to justice for litigants, but not so significant as to overburden the already crowded dockets of county court.”

Current Workgroups

In addition to the creation of the Appellate Review of County Court Decisions Workgroup, referenced above, Chief Justice Charles T. Canady, who now chairs the JMC, established two new workgroups: the Court Costs and Fines Workgroup, which is reviewing monetary assessments as well as identify innovative methods to reduce the disproportionate impact this issue sometimes has on low-income individuals; and the Remote Appearance Workgroup, which is considering how remote appearance technologies may be appropriately employed in the courts system to enhance efficiencies and cost effectiveness both for courts and for court users.

Performance and Accountability

The Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability (DCAP&A) and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A) were established in the late 1990s to enhance the performance of Florida’s courts and to ensure they use public resources efficiently and transparently (initially, they were created as committees under the branch’s Judicial Management Council).

Through the development of comprehensive resource management, performance measurement, and accountability programs, these commissions propose policies and procedures on matters related to the capable and effective functioning of Florida’s courts. Their responsibilities support numerous goals identified in the long-range plan, among them, bolstering 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).

The DCAP&A is currently chaired by Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, and the TCP&A is currently chaired by Judge Diana Moreland, Twelfth Circuit. Every two years via supreme court administrative order, each commission is re-established and directed to work on particular issues and projects. (This link goes to the administrative order governing the [2018 – 2020 term of the DCAP&A](#); for the administrative order governing the [2018 – 2020 term of the TCP&A](#), please follow this link.) Below are some of the major initiatives on which these commissions have been focusing.



Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, chairs the Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability.

Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability

District Court of Appeal Staffing Models

In the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the DCAP&A completed its reassessment of staffing models for the positions under the appellate clerks of court (these positions include deputy clerks, who handle functions such as processing incoming pleadings, docketing incoming briefs, preparing and entering orders and mandates, and managing files and records).

The last study and report on DCA staffing models was released in 2008. Four years later, a review was conducted when the 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 (central staff attorneys, law clerks, judicial assistants, marshal's office personnel, and clerk's office personnel). Because e-filing and other automated court processes have been implemented in the district courts since these evaluations, the DCAP&A expected to see changes in the workload associated with positions in the clerks' offices.



In the 2016 – 18 term, the DCAP&A worked with the district court clerks to revise the methodology for determining the number and kinds of clerk staff positions needed at each of the five DCAs. Based on the revised methodology and on data from fiscal year 2016 – 2017 clerk staffing level needs, the DCAP&A, in a 2018 report, recommended the retitling of some positions to reflect changes wrought by automation. In addition, due to the ways in which new technologies have revolutionized case processing and case disposition since the 2008 report, the DCAP&A proposed increases in the staffing level at three of the DCAs.

Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability

Although Florida's intermediate courts of appeal (the five DCAs) have been state-funded since their creation in 1957, the trial courts did not become funded through state appropriation 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, each trial court was funded by the individual county in which it sits, leading to disparities in the level of court services provided across the state. Revision 7 was designed to alleviate these disparities, using state funds to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources to each circuit. 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 three major technology initiatives: Virtual Remote Interpreting, the Performance Management Framework, and the Uniform Case Reporting System.



Judge Diana Moreland, Twentieth Circuit, chairs the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability.

Due Process Services

Due process is a judicial requirement that ensures legal proceedings are conducted in accordance with established rules and principles designed to safeguard people's legal rights. In Florida, the term *due process elements* refers to three resources that directly protect litigants' fundamental constitutional and legal rights: 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).

Established in 2015, the Due Process Workgroup is tasked with identifying factors affecting the cost of providing these due process services in the trial courts and with developing recommendations to improve the provision of these services. Because its charges involve both policy and fiscal considerations, the workgroup comprises members both from the TCP&A and from the Trial Court Budget Commission (chaired by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit). The workgroup is co-chaired by TCP&A chair Judge Moreland and TCBC member Judge John Stargel, Tenth Circuit.



The workgroup began by identifying funding and operational policy changes that could improve the provision of court-appointed expert witness services. Its report, [Expert Witnesses in Florida's Trial Courts](#), identifies factors affecting the cost of providing expert witness services and recommends comprehensive fiscal and operational solutions for the management of these services, including a statewide rate structure for the payment of certain types of evaluations. The supreme court adopted the report in a [February 2017 administrative order](#), and since then, the standards and best practices codified in the order have improved the delivery of expert witness services and have generated cost savings across the state. Indeed, because expert witness contractual expenditures decreased, the workgroup was able to recommend, and the TCBC approved, a year-end spending plan for fiscal year 2017 – 18 (the workgroup recommended that cost savings in contractual funds be utilized to purchase \$1.8 million in Virtual Remote Interpreting equipment to enhance court interpreting services). In addition, the cost savings prompted the workgroup to recommend a redistribution of resources among the three due process elements for fiscal year 2018 – 19.

In 2018, based on workgroup recommendations and feedback from trial courts around the state, the supreme court issued a revised rate structure chart to specify the types of evaluations covered by the statewide rate structure and to provide clarifications to the chart. These amendments, released in a [June 2018 administrative order](#), further standardize payments across the state.

Also in 2018, the workgroup turned its attention to the provision of court interpreting services. Based on the information it gathered, the workgroup focused its attention largely on the difficulty in hiring and retaining certified court interpreters. To address this challenge, the workgroup recommended a four-part court interpreter salary increase package, which was approved by the supreme court, contingent upon the Trial Court Budget Commission's confirmation of sufficient salary dollars.

Virtual Remote Interpreting

For people whose English language skills are limited, court interpreting services are essential in ensuring their constitutional right of access to justice. However, as the Due Process Workgroup noted above, the branch faces challenges in addressing the increased needs for quality interpreting services. Technology-based solutions are helping Florida's courts meet these challenges.

As early as 2010, several circuits began preliminary explorations of sharing remote interpreting services utilizing audio and video technology. Then in 2014, with funding from the legislature, the branch formally expanded this pilot effort: five circuits (the Seventh, Ninth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth) 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 (a joint venture of the TCP&A, the Court Interpreter Certification Board, and the Due Process Technology Workgroup), which developed a business model for sharing remote interpreting services across circuit jurisdictions. After the [court approved the business model](#), it directed the TCP&A to create the [Shared Remote Interpreting Governance Committee](#). Chaired by Chief Judge Elizabeth Metzger, Nineteenth Circuit, the committee was charged with establishing a 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.

The committee also oversees the implementation of the remote interpreting technology: Virtual Remote Interpreting (VRI) is a state-of-the-art solution that provides a service similar to telecommunications software application products like Skype and Facetime. While telephone interpreting is limited to providing consecutive interpreting (i.e., the interpreter must wait for the parties to finish speaking before communicating and providing an interpretation), VRI enables the provision of simultaneous interpreting (the interpreter communicates and interprets as the parties speak). Utilizing both video and audio components, VRI enables remote interpreters to provide service as if they were located in the courtroom.

The implementation of VRI is divided into three phases. In Phase I, in a courtroom with audio and video connection, the interpreter, dialing the specific courtroom location, appears remotely for pre-scheduled events; these events are point-to-point (two locations only), and calls (both audio and video portions) are routed through the call manager located in Tallahassee. Phase II includes the addition of multi-point functionality; via a bridge, located either on premises or in the cloud, participants can be in three different locations—e.g., a judge in the courtroom, a defendant at the jail, and the interpreter at his or her workstation. And in Phase III, interpreters appear remotely for on-demand events: from a courtroom with audio and video connection, a call made to a uniform number is routed to an available interpreter. VRI implementation is now in Phase II and is slated to be fully implemented in participating circuits in 2019.



Virtual Remote Interpreting provides a service similar to telecommunications software application products like Skype and Facetime. Using audio and video components, VRI enables the interpreter and the defendant to communicate simultaneously while the defendant is before the judge.

The Trial Court Performance Management Framework

In 2014, the supreme court directed the TCP&A to develop recommendations for a performance management framework that would support branch efforts to improve the trial courts' capacity for measuring their performance and applying the results to make procedural refinements. The underlying goal is to enhance service delivery in trial court services and programs and ensure the effective use of court resources. To carry out this directive, the TCP&A established the Performance Management Workgroup, which submitted [Foundations for a Performance Management Framework](#) in June 2016. This report describes the framework's goal and scope, its essential element principles and administrative principles, and its long-term objectives. The court approved the report and charged the commission with continuing its development of the framework.

Soon thereafter, Judge Moreland re-authorized the Performance Management Workgroup; after a year-long review of performance management literature, the workgroup, chaired by Judge William F. Stone, First Circuit, submitted *Recommendations to Improve Performance Management in Florida's Trial Courts*, which provides suggestions for advancing the statewide collection and use of performance measurement data. The supreme court adopted the report in October 2018, and, in keeping with report recommendations, the TCP&A, via [AOSC18-19](#), is now establishing a Data Quality Workgroup dedicated to improving and building confidence in trial court data.

The Uniform Case Reporting System

The Uniform Case Reporting System is a data collection project designed to capture the case activity data that the judicial branch deems necessary for achieving process improvement. The project was animated 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, which is chaired by Judge Paul Alessandrini, Charlotte County, the Uniform Case Reporting System implements near real-time case activity event reporting across all case types. In this project, a case is divided into a number of events of importance in tracking a case. Significantly, these events can be defined differently for each type of case.

Event reporting will provide greater detail of case activity generally, as well as a more nuanced picture of the activity occurring in a particular case type, thus enabling the courts system to better manage cases. Specifically, this more detailed caseload information will improve the judicial branch's ability to monitor practices and procedures, assist with the timely resolution of cases, manage local resources, justify funding requests, and satisfy constitutional duties such as the supreme court's annual "Certification of Need for Additional Judges."

Since June 2018, the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) has been working with clerks of court to support their implementation of this dynamic data exchange framework. While near-real time data exchange has proven challenging to all, by January 2019, more than 40 of the 67 clerks had completed their vendor development phase and began testing their data exchange capabilities with OSCA. In addition, nine counties have reached the second phase of the transition process: clerks, circuit court administration, and OSCA have been working together to verify and enhance the quality of the case activity data being exchanged. These quality data are the source for the essential organizational management tools that are instrumental in the branch's efforts to perform its mission with greater efficiency. To learn more about [Uniform Case Reporting](#), please follow this link.

Fairness and Diversity Awareness

Florida's judicial branch strives to exemplify 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." This commitment is also manifest in the first high-priority area of branch's long-range plan—"Deliver justice effectively, efficiently, and fairly"—and in the long-range plan's first articulated goal, which is to "Perform judicial duties and administer justice without bias or prejudice."

For more than three decades, the branch, with the help of numerous supreme court-appointed committees, has endeavored to realize these objectives, working heedfully 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. (Take this link to read more about the [history of fairness and diversity initiatives](#) in Florida's judicial branch.)

Presently shepherding the courts system's fairness initiatives is the Standing Committee on Fairness and

Diversity, 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." This committee is re-authorized every two years via administrative order, which identifies the particular issues that members are enjoined to address during that term. Currently chaired by Judge Peter F. Estrada, Tenth Circuit, the 17-member body—which includes judges, attorneys, a trial court clerk, and representatives from The Florida bar, law enforcement, Florida universities, and the office of equal opportunity—had another active term. During the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the committee focused extensively on building its outreach efforts to advance fairness and diversity initiatives in the Florida justice system and on expanding its diversity education campaign for judges and court staff (this link goes to the [administrative order governing the 2016 - 18 term](#)).

Among their efforts to support fairness and diversity initiatives in the justice system, committee members participated in mentoring events across the state. Among them were the John Kozyak Minority Mentoring Picnic, in Miami; the Hillsborough County Bar Association's Annual Diversity Networking Social, in Tampa; and the Tenth Circuit's Diversity and Inclusion Networking Social and Student Mentoring Event, in Lakeland. The committee also held a lunch and learn with faculty and students at the Florida State University College of Law. (To learn about other diversity events, both past and upcoming, view the committee's [Fairness and Diversity Calendar](#).)



The Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity is chaired by Judge Peter Estrada, Tenth Circuit (in center); the vice chair is Judge Claudia Isom (ret.), Thirteenth Circuit (third from left). Here, after a training at Ave Maria School of Law on Implicit Bias, Explicit Justice: Fairness and Diversity Insights from the Bench, they pose for a photo with some of the participants.

And in support of the committee’s diversity education efforts, Judge Estrada and Justice Alan Lawson (justice liaison to the committee) participated in a panel discussion on implicit bias in the courts at the Annual Reporters Workshop in Tallahassee; the Tenth Circuit coordinated its second Fairness and Diversity Summit, for which Justice Lawson was a keynote speaker; and the Fifth Circuit facilitated a Judicial Training in Implicit Bias program, for which Judge Estrada conducted diversity training for judges and court staff.

The most momentous training event was a Sentencing Bias Train-the-Trainer Program held at the Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law, Barry University, in April 2018. Thirty-four participants—including judges, court diversity team members, and other court staff—attended this two-day event, at which Professor Rachel Godsil, Seton Hall Law School, introduced them to the knowledge and skills needed to provide sentencing bias training to their local judges. After the program, the committee created a speaker’s list that identifies judges and court personnel staff throughout the state who have met the criteria necessary to provide diversity and sentencing bias training; these speakers will be available to conduct trainings for circuits, law schools, civic organizations, or other groups interested in promoting diversity or learning about sentencing bias. (The list is available on the branch’s [Fairness and Diversity webpage](#).)

In May 2019, Miami will host the thirty-first annual conference of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts—an organization that endeavors to promote racial, ethnic and fairness principles in courts across the country. Long-time committee member (and former committee chair) Judge Scott Bernstein, Eleventh Circuit, serves on the board of the National Consortium and is chairing the conference planning committee.

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 keystone of the justice system. This axiom inheres in the *Constitution of the State of Florida* (Article 1, section 21), which reads, “The courts shall be open to every person for redress of any injury and justice shall be administered without sale, denial or delay.” The reality, however, is that



Among the instructional offerings at the Tenth Circuit’s Third Annual Fairness and Diversity Summit, which drew approximately 75 participants, was a session called *How Diverse is Your Universe*, conducted by members of the summit planning committee. Pictured here are the planning committee chair, Judge Andrea Smith (at podium), and committee member Judge Kelly Butz.

litigants seeking access to the courts may still 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 thoughtfully and effectively to the legal needs and best interests of Florida’s most vulnerable populations (e.g., children, elder adults, people in need of decision-making assistance, and people with disabilities or with limited English proficiency), the branch aspires to ensure that everyone who enters the courts, whether literally or virtually, has meaningful access to justice and court services.

Section Topics:

- Access to Civil Justice
- Court Interpreting Services
- Guardianship
- Family Court
- Problem-Solving Courts
- Alternative Dispute Resolution

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, then Chief Justice Jorge Labarga signed an administrative order establishing 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 address the unmet civil legal needs of these populations. Among its accomplishments during the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the commission, chaired by Justice Labarga, launched the Florida Courts Help App, established a Council of Business Partners, and adopted a long-range plan for 2018 – 2021.



Members of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice during the commission’s August 9, 2018, meeting in Pensacola (l - r): Ms Robin Hassler Thompson, Mr. Dominic C. “Donny” MacKenzie, Judge Alicia L. Latimore (Ninth Circuit), Judge Terence R. Perkins (Seventh Circuit), Justice Jorge Labarga, and Senior Judge Olin Shinholser (Tenth Circuit). (photo courtesy of Pensacola News Journal)

Under the leadership of the commission, the Office of the State Courts Administrator developed the [Florida Courts Help App](#), a direct, mobile-friendly pathway to Florida’s most requested court information and forms, including 186 supreme court-approved, fillable family law forms; links and contact information for self-help

centers across the state; plain language instructions and descriptions of first steps and next actions; and contact information for a range of legal help from multiple online resources, for free and low-cost legal services, and for lawyer referral services. The app was downloaded more than 6,300 times between its release at the commission's December 2017 meeting and February 2019. On a related note, Office of the State Courts Administrator staff are finalizing their work with law students enrolled in the Georgetown Iron Tech Lawyer Program, a Georgetown Law Center initiative, to build an app that will guide users through an interactive, web-based "interview" dynamic, culminating in the production of an editable petition for the type of civil injunction most appropriate to their situation: domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, repeat violence, or stalking.



In addition, the commission created a Council of Business Partners to support its efforts to cultivate a collaborative relationship between the corporate community and the civil legal services



community. To assist in implementing its work, the council enlisted the support of the Young Lawyers Division of The Florida Bar. The council and Young Lawyers Division are now working together to enhance the council's communication toolkit (used by council members to engage the business community in access to civil justice initiatives and also available to businesses, which can use the toolkit to educate their employees about available legal resources); to develop promotional materials to inform businesses about how the lack of meaningful access to civil justice can adversely affect their employees' personal lives and work performance;

to examine the Florida Courts Help App to ensure its user-friendliness and to provide guidance for future enhancements; and to develop video content to assist self-represented litigants in navigating the court system and advancing their cases.

Furthermore, the commission adopted a long-range plan for 2018-2021, which articulates a course of action for guiding its future efforts to address access to civil justice challenges. The plan is organized around four broad access issues and includes specific goals to improve and expand access. It was developed through a deliberately constructed process designed to gather input from all members of the commission and the Council of Business Partners, and it serves as a vehicle for advancing meaningful access initiatives going forward. The four access issues addressed by the plan are as follows: Improve Triage and Referral; Emphasize Process Simplification; Provide Limited Legal Assistance; and Promote Plain Language. (Take this link to visit the [Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice](#) website.)

Court Interpreting Services

Due to its geographic location, Florida has more residents with limited-English-proficiency than most other states, and this population is increasing. Of its more than 20 million residents, approximately 4.1 million are foreign born. Moreover, roughly 28.7 percent of Florida's population age five and over speak a language other than English at home—with 41.3 percent estimated to "speak English less than *very well*" ([US Census Bureau, 2013 – 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#)). In developing the long-range plan, branch

leaders—mindful that the ability to communicate effectively in court is a basic right of all people in the US and 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).

Seeking to ensure that all people, regardless of their ability to communicate effectively in English, have meaningful access to the courts, the branch continues working to improve the overall quality of court interpreting services available. Each year, thousands of court cases in Florida require spoken language interpreters or assistance for individuals with hearing loss. Among its fundamental goals, court interpreting aspires to place those who use interpreting services on equal footing, within the court, with those who do not require interpreting services; to comply with Florida law and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and other federal laws; and to protect due process rights and fundamental interests.

To oversee this endeavor, the supreme court established the Court Interpreter Certification Board in 2006. Currently chaired by Judge Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit, the board is responsible for certifying, regulating, and disciplining court interpreters as well as for suspending and revoking certification (as set forth in the [Florida Rules for Certification and Regulation of Spoken Language Court Interpreters](#)). Among its accomplishments in the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the board formulated a strategic plan to set and manage language access priorities; initiated the process for developing training standards for providing court interpreter orientation workshops; and worked with the Florida Court Education Council to revise the *Florida Benchguide on Court Interpreting*.

With input from Court Interpreter Certification and Regulation Program staff, the Court Interpreter Certification Board reviewed current trial court compliance with a 2012 administrative order adopting operational standards and best practices for providing court interpreter services (see [AOSC11-45 Corrected](#)); examined other court-approved language access initiatives; and gauged the trial courts’ future language access needs. Based on these analyses, the board drafted a strategic plan that enumerates the existing programs, procedures, and resources that must be monitored and updated on an ongoing basis. The plan also identifies outstanding tasks, which fall under six general topic areas: language access policies and standards; language service providers; translation and signage; training; outreach to external stakeholders; and shared remote interpreting (to read about the implementation of Virtual Remote Interpreting, please see article on [Performance and Accountability](#) above). In addition, the plan offers an implementation timeline and assigns responsibilities for completion. Once finalized, the plan will be submitted to the supreme court for approval.

In addition, the Court Interpreter Certification Board, in order to facilitate the provision of additional orientation workshops for prospective court interpreters, will soon begin developing training standards and procedures for training providers seeking to offer this education prerequisite. As per the Court Interpreter



Tenth Circuit Judges Kevin Abdoney, Angela Cowden, and Jalal Harb (l – r), all presenters at the circuit’s 2018 Court Interpreters Workshop, confer during a break; approximately 60 court interpreters from the region participated in this day-long program on Capital Murder Cases from Arrest Through Trial: What Court Interpreters Need to Know. Judge Abdoney also chairs the supreme court’s Court Interpreter Certification Board.

Rules, all prospective spoken language court interpreters must satisfy a series of stringent requirements, the first of which is to participate in a two-day orientation program. Currently, because these orientations must be administered by the Office of the State Courts Administrator or by a training provider approved by the board, the number of programs offered each year is limited. For the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, for instance, only five orientations were scheduled, and in only three cities: two in Fort Lauderdale, one in Tampa, and two in Orlando. With the formulation of training standards and procedures, other board-approved training providers will be positioned to conduct orientation workshops, thereby expanding both the frequency and the number of jurisdictions in which the trainings are held in Florida—and, ultimately, increasing the pool of qualified interpreters statewide.

Finally, the board also worked on enhancing its educational resources for judges and court personnel. Most notably, in conjunction with the Publications Committee of the Florida Court Education Council, the board substantially revised the *Florida Benchguide on Court Interpreting*: a useful guide for judicial officers and their staff who handle Florida cases involving spoken or sign language interpreters. The benchguide—currently in its third edition—includes chapters on law and policy governing interpreters for people with limited-English-proficiency and for people who are deaf or hard of hearing; determining the need for, waiving the right to, and appointing a spoken language court interpreter; the roles, duties, and ethics of court interpreters; conducting proceedings with, and best practices for working with, court interpreters; and interpreters for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Among the revisions are updates regarding the rules regulating the appointment of and the retention of spoken language court interpreters; significant changes to the section on Appointing a Spoken Language Interpreter; and additional detail about what is meant by a “fundamental interest at stake” and what constitutes a “diligent search” for a qualified interpreter. In addition, the *Bench Card on Court Interpreting* was completely revamped and made a stand-alone document that judges can print and easily access.

Guardianship

Florida has been a magnet for retirees since the 1960s. Thus it should come as no surprise that the nation’s third most populous state is also home to the highest rate of residents age 65 and older. Currently, nearly four million Floridians, approximately 19.4 percent of the state’s inhabitants, are at least 65 years old ([US Census Bureau, 2013 – 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#)). Meanwhile, like the population of the US, the population of Florida is aging at an unprecedented rate, so that number is expected to rise: by 2030, more than 24 percent of the state’s residents are likely to have already marked 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. While



Chief Judge Frederick Lauten, Ninth Circuit, who chairs the Florida Wings stakeholder group, welcomes stakeholders to the fourth WINGS summit, which was held in the Florida Supreme Court.

older Floridians constitute the majority of guardianship cases, it is important to note that this is not the only demographic for whom a guardian may be appointed: the court may appoint a guardian to manage the personal and/or financial affairs of any person who is legally unable to manage his or her own affairs, which could include a minor or an adult with a developmental disability, a mental health disability, or an age-related disability.

Guardianship is one of the few case types in the state that has shown growth over the last five years: between fiscal years 2013 – 14 and 2017 – 18, guardianship filings have increased 12.17 percent. Perceiving this rise in guardianship cases as a potential trend, the judicial branch has been involved in two significant efforts to improve guardianship processes.

The first is the supreme court’s Guardianship Workgroup, which was established under the Judicial Management Council in 2016 to try to address this seeming trend and its ramifications for the courts. The workgroup was tasked with examining judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianships to ensure that courts are best protecting the well-being of people adjudicated to be incapacitated and people alleged to have diminished capacity. In its final report, submitted to the supreme court in 2018, the workgroup made 25 recommendations for consideration and referral, where appropriate, to the responsible stakeholders. (For more about this workgroup, please see the article on the [Judicial Management Council](#) above.)

And, second, with a grant and technical assistance from the American Bar Association’s Commission on Law and Aging and the National Center for State Courts, the Office of the State Courts Administrator facilitated a Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) initiative. Chaired by Judge Frederick J. Lauten, Ninth Judicial Circuit, Florida WINGS is a group of stakeholders dedicated to creating solutions through collaborative partnerships by identifying, assessing, and improving guardianship practices and other decision-making alternatives to enhance the quality of care and lives of vulnerable adults. The vision of Florida WINGS is to serve the best interests of those needing decision-making assistance, thereby promoting their well-being, dignity, self-determination, and independence.

Divided into three committees, WINGS members are currently working on the top three priority areas, which are to determine which circuits do not have a sufficient number of physicians participating on their examining committees and develop a recruitment plan for those circuits to use; design a toolkit containing comprehensive information about decision-making options, for distribution to the public; and provide law enforcement officers and first responders with one or more tools to assist them in identifying and reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The committees are completing their work now and will soon submit their work products to the WINGS steering committee. As the work related to each priority area is completed, subsequent priority areas will be addressed.



Many state agencies and private organizations target policy and practice issues related to guardianship from their own perspectives and work to advance solutions for specific issues. But what makes the WINGS effort exceptional is its endeavor to collaboratively map a comprehensive strategy for improved processes and increased effectiveness. Reflecting on the advantages and aims of the WINGS initiative, former Florida State Courts Administrator PK Jameson said, “Florida will be positioned to embrace systems change within the guardianship process, avoid unnecessary guardianships, and better identify ways to address financial exploitation.” Take this link for more information about [Florida WINGS](#).

Family Court

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

Many of the branch's innovative family court programs and practices are introduced by the supreme court's Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (first established in 1994 as the Family Court Steering Committee); this committee provides direction, guidance, and support to courts around the state, helping to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of family court operations. Also offering guidance to the courts is the Dependency Court Improvement Panel; established in 2009 by then Chief Justice Peggy Quince, this panel addresses ways to improve practices and decision-making specifically in dependency cases. Another important family-court-related resource is the Office of Court Improvement, a unit of the Office of the State Courts Administrator; in addition to staffing the steering committee and the panel, this unit develops a wide range of family court trainings, publications, and other materials for family court judges, court personnel, and court users. Through implementing the innovations developed by these three resources, the judicial branch works to resolve family court cases in a fair, timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner. Below, read about some of their recent accomplishments.

Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court

Every two years, the supreme court re-authorizes the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (FCC) by administrative order, directing it to work on specific issues and projects (take this link to the administrative order governing the [2016 – 18 term of the FCC](#)). The FCC is currently chaired by Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, and comprises judges, court administrators, and justice system partners.

During the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the FCC addressed the following: it surveyed the handling of criminal domestic violence cases in the circuits and developed recommendations for model practices to help ensure the safety of the victims, eliminate conflicting orders between divisions, and provide clear, statewide standards; it continued monitoring and working with each circuit on refining [one family/one judge practices](#) and initiated a process for defining a set of desired outcomes to delineate a successful one family/one judge model; it examined court rules, pertinent statutes, and legislative proposals that affect the [model family court concept](#) and determined where changes are necessary to enhance the operation of family courts; it continued monitoring the [school-justice partnership efforts](#) in existing sites and worked with the Fifth Circuit to launch a partnership in Citrus County; and it assisted the Dependency Court Improvement Panel with the



The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court distinguished Justice Barbara J. Pariente (seated) with the inaugural Justice for Children and Families Award, which “honor[s] a person or entity advancing the spirit and ideals of a model family court, while accomplishing the judicial branch mission of protecting rights and liberties, upholding and interpreting the law, and providing for the peaceful resolution of disputes.” Standing behind Justice Pariente is Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, chair of the steering committee.

creation of the *Early Childhood Court Best Practice Standards* and with the importing of trauma-responsive court practices to all family court case types (read more about the Dependency Court Improvement Panel below).

Dependency Court Improvement Panel

Currently chaired by Judge Hope Bristol, Seventeenth Circuit, the statewide, multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel continued enhancing its Early Childhood Court Initiative and also launched its Opioid Crisis – Court Response Initiative.

Early Childhood Court encompasses child welfare cases involving children under the age of three. Like other problem-solving courts, Early Childhood Court addresses the root causes of justice system involvement through the use of specialized dockets, multidisciplinary teams, a non-adversarial approach, and differentiated case management principles (i.e., judicial system resources are allotted based on the complexity and needs of individual cases, ensuring the most efficient use of court resources as well as the most effective solutions that promote long-term stability for litigants). Offering evidence-based treatment, judicial supervision, and accountability, Early Childhood Court seeks to improve child safety and well-being, heal trauma and repair the parent/child relationship, promote timely permanency, and stop the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment.



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

The seed for Early Childhood Court was planted in the 1990s, when Judge Cindy Lederman in Miami pioneered the concept of collaborating with a child psychologist and an early childhood expert on behalf of young children in the dependency court system. Building on this concept, the national organization ZERO TO THREE developed the “Safe Babies Court Team approach,” a method that effectively alters the trajectory of maltreated children and their families. Jurisdictions throughout Florida have been using this approach since 2015, referring to it as [Early Childhood Court](#). The outcomes in Florida—like those across the nation—have been impressive: compared to jurisdictions with traditional dependency courts, jurisdictions with Early Childhood Court dockets have demonstrated more timely permanency outcomes and a reduction of re-abuse. Over the past five years, Florida’s Early Childhood Courts have grown from three sites to 22 sites, and the implementation of new sites is ongoing.



The second major project on which the dependency panel has been working, the Opioid Crisis – Court Response Initiative, has links to the Early Childhood Court Initiative. As former Justice Barbara J. Pariente recently observed, “Every day, misuse and addiction to opioids causes deaths and destroys families.... In family court, the impact of opioid addiction is most visible in the dependency docket, in many cases overwhelming our foster care system. We see babies born addicted to opioids and families torn apart by addiction. Our Early Childhood Courts could not be more important than now” (this link goes to [former Justice Pariente’s article](#)).

An estimated 2.5 million Americans are addicted to opioids. From 2016–2017, several states, including Florida, saw spikes in overdose death rates of more than 30 percent, most likely due to the increasing presence of fentanyl (a deadly synthetic drug) in their illicit drug supply; in Florida alone, overdoses, mostly of heroin and fentanyl, claimed more than 900 lives in 2015 and nearly 6,000 in 2016. Given the effects of opioids on

families and family court, in late 2017, the dependency panel was galvanized to turn its attention to the opioid crisis. With staff from the Office of Court Improvement (OCI), Judge Bristol collaborated with national consultants and Judge Jeri Beth Cohen, Eleventh Circuit, to coordinate an opioid training event for Broward County in March 2018. More than 60 attendees—including judges, magistrates, court staff, attorneys, child protective investigators, community-based care case managers, guardian ad litem representatives, and service providers—participated in the training, which focused on the opioid substances commonly used by families involved in child welfare and judicial systems; connections between parental opioid use and specific harms to children; and the most effective treatment for opioid use disorder.



Judge Jeri Beth Cohen, Eleventh Circuit, conducts workshops on the opioid crisis for judges, magistrates, court staff, and justice system partners.

The opioid crisis was also the focus of the dependency panel's April 2018 in-person meeting. Soon thereafter, panel members and OCI staff coordinated two opioid workshops for the 2018 Child Protection Summit in Orlando. In addition, in June 2018, the OCI joined with the Florida Department of Children and Families to apply for a federal grant to help tackle the opioid crisis; with the grant funds, the Office of the State Courts Administrator has hired a court operations consultant to oversee this two-year project, which includes enhancing OCI's data systems, conducting needs assessments, developing resources, and providing training and technology assistance for judges, magistrates, and court staff throughout the state.

Office of Court Improvement

The [Office of Court Improvement](#) (OCI) works to promote efficient and effective court processes and practices through a variety of improvement initiatives, including advancing the one family/one judge model, standardizing and expanding problem-solving dockets, and implementing trauma-responsive court practices. Among their responsibilities, OCI staff provide or facilitate trainings and develop publications and other resources for family court judges, court personnel, and court users. Among its major projects during the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the OCI expanded the reach of its Domestic Violence Regional Trainings, significantly enhanced the web presence of its Institute on Interpersonal Violence, and created the Yammer Judicial Forum, an online community where judges can connect and discuss current court-related issues.

In September 2014, the OCI began offering regional trainings to all judicial officers who handle any aspect of civil domestic violence (DV) injunctions. Co-created by Judge Carroll Kelly, Miami-Dade County, and Judge Peter



Justice Pariente poses for a photo with staff from the Office of Court Improvement, whom she credits with having done “some of the heaviest lifting” in helping the branch implement its visionary family court and problem-solving court initiatives.

Ramsberger, Sixth Circuit, the trainings were conceived as a mechanism to enhance statewide consistency and uniformity and to encourage proactive sharing among judges across Florida. During the trainings, attendees receive specialized DV training on issues such as the procedural and substantive matters pertaining to DV injunctions, the dynamics of DV, and the impact of DV on children. Four additional trainings were offered during fiscal year 2017 – 18, including one that focused on technology and electronic stalking; two other trainings were offered in early 2019. Thus far, more than 300 judges have participated in a regional training since its launch four-and-a-half years ago. For information about upcoming trainings, see the [Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence Calendar](#).

In addition to facilitating the regional trainings, OCI staff made notable improvements to the [Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence website](#). The “go to” source for judicial information about DV, this website has been reconfigured, making it user-friendly for all viewers, regardless of the device or browser used. In addition, articles and resources have been updated, and the site is now easier to navigate.



Also, working with Judge Jack Helinger, Sixth Circuit, and Judge Terrance Ketchel, First Circuit, OCI staff created the Yammer Domestic Violence Statewide Judicial Forum: an online locale where Florida’s judicial officers can share information, resources, and training news with one another. Yammer registrants can also connect with and ask questions of judges sitting on the same bench in other regions of the state; send messages to the entire group; send private messages to individuals or small groups of members; and share files and notes or upload articles and documents. Currently, judges—who can access Yammer on their computers, phones, or tablets—can join judicial forums on the following topics: Domestic Violence; One Family/One Judge; Domestic Relations and Paternity; Dependency; Early Childhood Court; Delinquency; and Senior Judges. Thus far, nearly 200 judges have registered for the Yammer Judicial Forum. Inquiries may be sent to vcsupport@flcourts.org.

Problem-Solving Courts

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, 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 public safety as well as the participant’s success.

The first problem-solving court was established in 1989, when then Judge Herbert Klein, Miami-Dade County, launched the nation’s,



Judge Steve Leifman, Miami-Dade County, chaired the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts and now chairs the Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts. Next to him is Justice Peggy Quince, who served as the justice liaison to the task force.

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 (for more on early childhood court, see the [Family Court article](#) above). Currently, Florida has 92 drug courts (46 adult felony, seven adult misdemeanor, 20 juvenile, 15 family dependency, and four driving under the influence courts); 25 mental health courts; 30 veterans courts; and 22 early childhood courts. (This link goes to more information about Florida's [problem-solving courts](#); follow this link for a side-by-side view of the [core components](#) of the six most prevalent types of problem-solving courts in Florida.)

In 2017 – 2018, the governance and the funding methodology of Florida's problem-solving courts underwent some notable changes.

In July 2018, the supreme court created a new governance committee, the [Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts](#), to address the needs of court-engaged individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders, using differentiated case management principles and other evidence-based and emerging best practices. Chaired by Judge Steve Leifman, Miami-Dade County, this steering committee will continue and expand upon the work of the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts. First, using as its model the task force's [Florida Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards](#), which was approved by the supreme court in July 2017, the steering committee is charged with developing best practice standards for other problem-solving courts, namely, veterans court, juvenile drug court, family dependency drug court, driving under the influence court, and mental health court (note: in 2018, the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court finalized proposed standards for early childhood courts, which are pending approval by the court). And, second, the steering committee has been working to finalize the problem-solving court certification program on which the task force began to focus in 2017; the steering committee is developing necessary protocols, forms, and tools and also determining the resources necessary to implement the certification program. The program, which will be voluntary, will give Florida's problem-solving courts a chance to demonstrate their adherence to the evidence-based best practice standards. In developing problem-solving court standards and in establishing a certification program, the steering committee is working to ensure that Florida's problem-solving courts are operating effectively and with fidelity to the standards scientifically shown to produce better outcomes.

In addition, the judicial branch began addressing changes in the ways problem-solving courts are funded at the state level. In the past, lawmakers appropriated the funding for these courts individually. However, for fiscal year 2018 – 19, the legislature allotted a new, special appropriation in the amount of \$8.9 million for problem-solving courts; this appropriation rolled existing, recurring appropriations for problem-solving courts into one appropriation, infused another \$2.5 million in recurring funds, and provided additional funding to support these courts, directing the supreme court's Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC) to allocate these funds with certain conditions. To oversee this responsibility, the TCBC created the Problem-Solving Court Advisory Group; originally chaired by Chief Judge Elijah Smiley, Fourteenth Circuit, the advisory group comprised members of the TCBC, the Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts, and the Steering Committee on Children and Families in the Court. After allocating all the funds for the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the group transitioned to a subcommittee of the Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts and is now chaired by Judge Leifman. The subcommittee planned a long-term strategy for how funds will be allocated in future fiscal years, and this strategy was approved by the TCBC in February 2019. This change in the way problem-solving courts are funded by the state is indeed consequential, for it has given the judicial branch more discretion with the apportionment of state dollars.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Mediation and other alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes provide litigants with the opportunity to resolve their conflicts without judicial intervention. Florida's courts have been promoting these processes for more than 40 years. Florida's first citizen dispute settlement center was established in 1975, in Dade County. Soon after, the state's first county court mediation program was established in Broward County. Then in 1988, following a study conducted by the Legislative Study Commission on Alternative Dispute Resolution, mediation and arbitration were brought under the umbrella of the Florida courts system. Since then, Florida has developed one of the most comprehensive court-connected mediation programs in the country. (This link goes to more information about [ADR and mediation](#).)

To assist the courts in developing ADR programs and to conduct education and research on ADR in general, then Chief Justice Joseph Boyd and FSU College of Law Dean Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte established the Florida Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) in the mid-1980s. Housed in the supreme court building, the DRC also provides staff assistance to the five supreme court mediation boards and committees; certifies mediators and mediation training programs in five areas (county, family, circuit, dependency, and appellate); oversees the grievance procedure against mediators and parenting coordinators; sponsors an annual conference for mediators and arbitrators and provides basic and advanced mediation training to volunteer mediators; and publishes a newsletter and an annual [ADR Resource Handbook](#).

Currently, more than 5,600 mediators serve the citizens of Florida. Every two years, to enhance their professional competence and to maintain their certification, mediators are required to earn at least 16 hours of continuing mediator education (which includes instruction in mediator ethics, interpersonal violence education, and diversity/cultural awareness). Each year, to help mediators satisfy this requirement, the DRC sponsors a statewide conference that offers two days of education for ADR neutrals in the areas of mediation, arbitration, and collaborative processes; conducts three 20-hour certified county mediation training programs for the small claims mediators who volunteer for the trial court mediation programs; conducts between six and eight advanced mediator ethics and professional programs for certified mediators working in court-connected mediation programs; and, in collaboration with local schools, sponsors an annual Mediation Week celebration at the supreme court. Through offering these education programs and trainings, the DRC helps to ensure that certified mediators are effectively and professionally performing their challenging work and are well-equipped to meet the needs of those they serve. All told, in fiscal year 2017 – 18, approximately 200 mediators across the state reaped the benefits of trainings conducted by DRC staff.



Every year, Dispute Resolution Center staff conduct advanced continuing mediation education trainings across the state. These free, six-hour trainings focus largely on mediator ethics but often address diversity and interpersonal violence topics as well. Pictured here is the "class photo" of the county mediators from the Seventh Circuit who participated in this training in December 2018.

In addition to being the predominant providers of ADR education and training events throughout the year, the DRC staffs five supreme court committees: the Mediator Ethics Advisory Committee (which offers written

[ethics advisory opinions](#) based on questions from

certified and court-

appointed mediators); the Mediation Training Review Board (which considers complaints against certified mediation training programs); the Mediator Qualifications and Discipline Review Board (which hears grievance issues involving certified and court-appointed mediators, including issues of good moral character); and the Parenting Coordinator Review Board (which hears grievances involving qualified and court-appointed parenting coordinators). The DRC is also responsible for overseeing the [discipline of certified and court-appointed mediators and of qualified and court-appointed parenting coordinators](#). (Take this link for more information about the [supreme court's mediation boards and committees](#).)



In February 2018, Dispute Resolution Center staff offered a free, six-hour mediator ethics and professionalism training to Fifth Circuit mediators; altogether, more than 60 mediators from all across the circuit attended.



Dispute Resolution Center staff also conduct trainings for some of the state's youngest mediators. In October 2018, Fairview Middle School students studying conflict resolution skills marked Mediation Week with a visit to the supreme court. In addition to having an opportunity to hear Justice Quince speak and to pose for a photo with her (see above), they participated in a variety of education sessions.

The fifth committee the DRC staffs is the Committee on ADR Rules and Policy, which provides the court with recommendations relating to all aspects of ADR policy and rules, legislation, model ADR practices, mediator certification and renewal requirements (including continuing mediator education), and mediation training program standards and requirements. In 2017, then Chief Justice Labarga directed this committee to work with the Trial Court Budget Commission and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability to consider issues related to eligibility and fee equality for court-connected family mediation services provided to litigants, including indigent parties. To address these charges, the committee established the Mediation Fee and Civil Indigent Workgroup, whose 2018 recommendations were approved by the Committee on ADR Rules and Policy and adopted by the supreme court. The workgroup is now working to implement the recommendations, which will ensure that the eligibility for services is fairly determined, financial affidavits are used as the basis for fee assessment, and the fees parties are assessed are based on the income of each individual party, not the income of the opposing party.

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.

Trust in an institution is not a given. But trust can be gained. Studies have found that when people have a knowledge and understanding of the American justice system, their trust in and support for the courts are heightened. To deepen this knowledge, courts across Florida offer educational events and activities for “students” of all ages, providing residents with a host of opportunities to learn about the roles, functions, responsibilities, and accomplishments of the judicial branch. In working to meet the goals of the branch-wide communication plan, and in developing a bounty of education and outreach initiatives using traditional as well as more contemporary communication methods, 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.

Section Topics:

- Branch-Wide Court Communication Plan
- Education and Outreach Initiatives

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, other court staff, and experts from the private sector, 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 both internally and externally, and communicate effectively using coordinated, strategic efforts. Implementation began in January 2016.

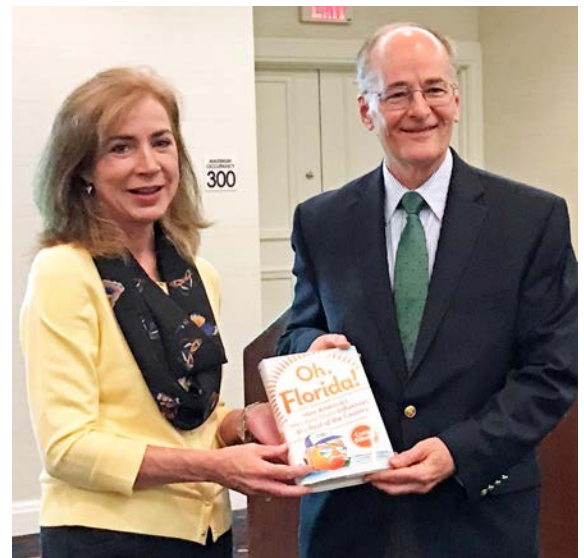
Then Chief Justice Jorge Labarga charged the branch's designated public information officers (PIOs) with putting the plan into effect in their respective courts, directing them to design strategies and activities that best respond to local needs and resources. Representing the 20 judicial circuits, the five district courts of appeal, the Office of the State Courts Administrator, and the Florida Supreme Court, these PIOs are members of a statewide nonprofit professional association, the [Florida Court Public Information Officers](#), (FCPIO), which holds an annual educational conference as well as monthly conference calls to advance the communications goals outlined in the plan. (Follow this link to access the FCPIO's [Year Two Implementation Report](#) on the communication plan.)



Among its strategies for implementing the communication plan, the supreme court began using Facebook Live in January 2018 to broadcast court events. Other courts in Florida and elsewhere have used Facebook Live to stream one-time events such as court ceremonies (e.g., judicial investitures or the opening of a new courthouse). But the Florida Supreme Court is the first court in the nation to use Facebook for live, unedited appellate oral argument broadcasts. Viewers can watch the live video simply by visiting or following the [court's Facebook page](#) (they can subscribe to receive notifications when the court begins a live broadcast). After more than a year of continuous use now, the Facebook Live broadcasts have shown themselves to be an overwhelmingly positive development, helping to promote public trust and confidence by improving transparency and openness.

Using Facebook Live for oral argument broadcasts was so novel that it received nationwide media attention when first announced and is being studied today by other court systems, other governmental bodies, and information technology professionals around the world. The most commonly asked question by other courts concerns the comments that viewers can add at the bottom of the broadcast feed. Some judges and court personnel worry that these Facebook comments could become disorderly and detract from the dignity of the broadcast itself. However, supreme court PIOs have not found this to be the case, saying that most comments are relevant and dignified. The few that are not can be handled by enforcement of the court's Use Policy, attached to the Facebook page itself. Staff worked carefully to craft a use policy that comports with state and federal law as well as the First Amendment.

Another strategy for implementing the communication plan has been the supreme court's [Beyond the Bench](#) podcast program, launched in January 2018. These podcasts address the work carried out by some of the departments at the supreme court, especially those that have the most interaction with the public, such as the Clerk's Office, the Supreme Court Library, and the Public Information Office. The inaugural podcast features then Chief Justice Labarga and Judge Nina Ashenafi-Richardson, Leon County, discussing how Florida courts communicate with people. In addition to affirming the importance of jurors and of impartial courts, they talk about social media, cameras in the courtroom, and some classic movies about the legal system; six additional podcasts have been issued since then. Other Florida courts have also been producing podcasts: the



Chief Justice Charles T. Canady, the closing speaker at the 2018 Florida Court Public Information Officers Annual Meeting, thanked court PIOs for the work they do to implement the communication plan. He is pictured above with Ms Michelle Kennedy, PIO for the Eighth Circuit and FCPIO president.

Eleventh Circuit recently released its sixth podcast (take this link to [Community Connect Online](#)), and in March 2019, the Ninth Circuit issued its seventieth podcast (take this link to [Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom](#)). Podcasting provides a new and useful way for courts to discuss their roles and for the public to develop a better understanding of the judges who preside over state courts. As the Ninth Circuit's program so deftly demonstrates, by enabling the public to hear judges talk about their lives and experiences, podcasts, in addition to educating people about the work of the courts, also help to "humanize" judges and justice system processes.



At their 2018 annual meeting, court public information officers could participate in a hands-on session on podcasting; pictured above are the PIOs from the Twelfth Circuit, Mr. Dennis Menendez; the Sixth Circuit, Mr. Stephen Thompson; and the Seventh Circuit, Ms. Ludi Lelis.

The communication plan also recommends that Florida courts review their websites, ensuring that they effectively provide information about court processes and procedures, services available, and methods for accessing them. Thus, recognizing that their web presence is the "face" of their court—and their primary communication tool—many of Florida's circuit and appellate courts have revamped the organization and content of their websites. For the supreme court and the five district courts of appeal, this process has been undertaken in a concerted way, spearheaded by the Appellate Court Web Redesign Committee. The redesigned DCA websites, which have a similar look and feel to one another, now have a user-friendly design, are mobile device-responsive, and present information in a clear and organized fashion; the [Fourth DCA](#) launched its new site in April 2018, and the [First DCA](#) and the [Second DCA](#) introduced theirs soon thereafter. The new [supreme court website](#), which went live in December 2018, has some similarities to the DCA sites but maintains a distinct look and feel. Mobile-friendly and user-focused, this new site includes improvements to website architecture, navigation, accessibility, and content to enhance findability and usability for all web audiences. Undergirding its redesign was the goal of providing an efficient mechanism for conducting court business, informing audiences about the work of the court, and increasing understanding about the supreme court and the judicial branch to improve public trust and confidence.



Education and Outreach

The judicial branch has developed a bounty of resources and opportunities for the people of Florida to learn about their courts. Every circuit and appellate court in the state hosts programs and activities that inform the public about the courts system—initiatives such as courthouse tours, citizen guides, school outreach programs, 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 court" types of programs, adoption events,

speakers bureaus, citizen advisory committees, and media outreach efforts. Through these initiatives, 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, including 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. And the Florida Supreme Court's [About the Court tab](#) provides information about supreme court justices, supreme court history, Florida law, Florida courts structure, the supreme court seal, the portrait gallery, art in the court, the architecture of the building, and the various supreme court departments. Described below are some of the other ways the branch strives to provide Floridians with positive, meaningful interactions with their courts.

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 organized by the supreme court and The Florida Bar Board of Governors, in conjunction with the trial court chief judges and the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee. All judicial candidates seeking contested seats or facing active opposition for merit retention are encouraged to attend. 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 May 2018, forums were scheduled for 10 cities throughout Florida. (To learn more about the standards of ethical



The High School Moot Court Competition offers students a unique opportunity to learn about the appellate process. 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.



In the courtroom of the supreme court, Legislative Scholars from the University of Central Florida huddle around Justice Alan Lawson, who talks to them about supreme court jurisdiction and the oral argument process.

behavior governing judicial candidates, see [An Aid to Understanding Canon 7](#), prepared by the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee.)

Annual Reporters Workshop

Recognizing the importance of playing a proactive role in heightening reporters' understanding of the courts 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 jurists, 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.

Florida Supreme Court Teacher Institute

Initially conceived in response to a national study documenting the public's lack of, and need for, court-related information, the [Florida Supreme Court Teacher Institute](#) (formerly known as the Justice Teaching Institute) was first offered in 1997, when then Chief Justice Gerald Kogan launched 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.

Taught 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 Court Teacher Institute is one of the judicial branch's most promising efforts to support teachers' efforts to introduce their students to the vital role courts play in our society.



After speaking in depth about the exclusionary rule and probable cause to Justice Teacher Institute fellows, Justice R. Fred Lewis pauses for a group photo.

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. 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. Held August through June, oral arguments are 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.) In addition, since February 2018, all arguments before the state's highest court can be viewed on [Facebook Live](#). Those who cannot attend oral arguments or who are interested in seeing archived ones (the archives go back to 1997) can watch them online, via WFSU's [Gavel to Gavel](#). Information about [high-profile supreme court cases](#), both current and archived, is also available online.



After their mock oral argument, and after watching the justices conduct an oral argument on the very same case, the 2018 Justice Teaching Institute Fellows relish the opportunity to pose for a group shot with the justices.

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 schedule a 45-minute Educational Program/Building Tour and learn fascinating details about the supreme court building and the personalities who have given life to the court over the years; the tour includes the rotunda, courtroom, library, and rare book room. Smaller groups, or those who prefer to furnish themselves with informational brochures and set off at their own pace, can take a self-guided tour.

In addition, student groups can be scheduled for the Mock Oral Argument Program. This 90-minute activity, which is conducted by a staff attorney or knowledgeable volunteer, culminates in the enactment—in the courtroom of the supreme court—of an oral argument using a hypothetical case. Especially during the 60-day legislative session, from all across the state, teachers bring their students to the supreme court to learn about the third branch of government. All in all, in the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, 8,246 visitors of all ages participated in

supreme court education programs. (This link goes to additional information about [tours and education programs at the supreme court.](#))

Florida Supreme Court Library and Archives

The [Florida Supreme Court Library](#), founded in 1845, is one of 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 learn about the treasures in its rare book room.



At the Constitution Day event at the supreme court, young visitors embrace the chance to participate in mock oral arguments.

The library also harbors the supreme court archives, which contain primary documents of Florida Supreme Court history related to the court and its justices. In 1982, the supreme court librarian at the time had the notion of engaging the assistance of some of the dignitaries of the legal community to seek out, collect, preserve, and make publicly available the important historical documents of the members of Florida's highest court. His idea galvanized the creation of the Florida Supreme Court Historical Society; together, the librarian and the historical society began the process of building the collection—and the archives came into being.

Thanks to the abiding partnership between the historical society and the library, the archives continue to thrive. Recently retired Justices Barbara Pariente and Peggy Quince made the most copious donations of late: their office files, travel files, opinion files, speeches, and correspondence filled more than 241 boxes (each box holds one and one-half cubic feet of paper). Though some of the papers are confidential, many of these records will soon be available to researchers, scholars, and other members of the public.



Florida Supreme Court Archivist Erik Robinson begins the task of arranging the records donated by retired Justices Pariente and Quince; the documents filled more than 240 boxes.

During the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the library archivist worked on multiple projects. He completed inventorying the papers of former Justice James Alderman (on the bench from 1978 – 85); the justice's speeches, personal and administrative work papers, court conference notes, opinion files, correspondence, and personal memorabilia are now cataloged. Moreover, he began cataloging the professional correspondence, notebooks, and work papers donated by retired Justice James E.C. Perry (on the bench from 2009 – 16). He also inventoried a set of speeches recently donated by retired Justice Stephen Grimes (on the bench from 1987 – 97); these speeches, delivered when he was chief justice (1994 – 95), were added to the existing collection of the justice's papers. Finally, the archivist began reviewing a set of autobiographical writings and scrapbook materials of former Justice William Ellis (on the bench from 1915 – 38), donated by a descendant; the autobiographical writings primarily address the justice's time as Florida attorney general (1904 – 09), but the scrapbook materials, mostly newspaper clippings, include his years on the bench.



Archivist Erik Robinson stands beside Ms Jean Swafford, donor of the Underwood typewriter on which former Justice W. Glenn Terrell is said to have drafted many of his opinions. Behind them are Ms Linnea Dulikravich and Ms Aimee Clesi, interns with the supreme court's Public Information Office.

The archivist also scanned the first *Minute Book of the Florida Supreme Court*, which covers 1846 – 67. Minute books are kept by the clerk of court for recording summaries of all the judicial orders in proceedings. This particular minute book, more than 500 pages long, preserves the supreme court's earliest records—which were previously unavailable—and makes them accessible for research use.

In addition to paper treasures, the archives are home to a photograph collection, art work—and even office furniture and office equipment of value to supreme court history. Ms Leslie Dughi, daughter of long-time Florida legislative photographer Don Dughi, shared digital rights to a considerable number of supreme court justice photographs taken from the 1970s – 90s; she also allowed the archivist to scan and add to the collection numerous rare photos and negatives from the photographer's personal archives. And a large set of photographic negatives of supreme court justices and Office of the State Courts Administrator staff, taken by photographer Larry Colthorp, was donated to the supreme court; these too were scanned and added to the photograph collection. In addition, Panama City artist Roland Hockett donated preliminary drawings of the two bronze eagle sculptures that are on display in the supreme court rotunda. Finally, an historic desk and a classic typewriter, both with judicial connections, were recently gifted to the archives: the Wooten rotary, double pedestal, roll-top desk, donated by the historical society, belonged to former Justice James B. Whitfield (on the bench from 1904 – 43) and is now on display in the library reading room; the 35-pound Underwood typewriter, on which former Justice W. Glenn Terrell (on the bench from 1923 – 64) is said to have drafted many of his opinions, is now on display in the supreme court rotunda.

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 expect their courts to be effective, efficient, and convenient; they presume that due process will be followed, that disputes will be resolved fairly and in a timely manner, and that useful information will be available to them readily and without undue cost. To meet these expectations, Florida's courts system—which disposed more than 3.3 million cases on average over each of the last five years—is always working to improve the processes it uses to accomplish its constitutional mission. Breakthroughs in the uses of technology have proven especially fruitful in refining the efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness, and security of court processes.

While safeguarding the security of court data and technology systems is a fundamental concern, so too is the safeguarding of judges, court personnel, and court users—as well as of the court facilities themselves. The branch takes seriously its responsibility to keep the doors of the courthouse open while protecting the people within its walls from emergencies or threats that could endanger them, disrupt court operations, or delay justice.

Section Topics:

- Court Technology
- Emergency Preparedness

Court Technology

Technology has become indispensable to the daily operations of the courts, revolutionizing the way the branch meets the needs of everyone who works in or has business in a courthouse, whether physically or virtually. In recent years, Florida's judicial branch has made significant advances in deploying technology to facilitate the effective, efficient, fair, and timely resolution of cases: it continues to make strides with electronic filing (e-filing); data collection, data management, and case management systems; technological communications enabling the sharing of limited resources (e.g., remote court interpreting services); services for the mobile environment; cybersecurity services; and the automation of court-related processes.

Because technology permeates all aspects of the judicial branch—its procedures, operations, services, and programs—information about court technology projects is ubiquitous, at hand in other sections of this annual

report and elsewhere on the Florida Courts website, flcourts.org:

- To read about Virtual Remote Interpreting, the Trial Court Performance Management Framework, and the Uniform Case Reporting System—initiatives for which the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability is responsible—see the article on [Performance and Accountability](#) above;
- For information on the Do It Yourself Florida project, designed to help self-represented litigants create electronic documents suitable for filing, go to the article on the [Judicial Management Council](#) above;
- To learn about the Florida Courts Help App, a mobile-friendly pathway to the most requested court information and forms, view the [Access to Civil Justice](#) article above;
- Read about some of the courts system’s e-learning initiatives in the article below on [Education for Judges, Quasi-Judicial Officers, and Court Personnel](#);
- On the Florida Courts website is a chronicling of the recent work of the [Florida Courts Technology Commission](#), which 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;
- Also available on the Florida Courts website is a description of various other [ongoing court technology projects](#).



New Storage Area Network (SAN) increases the courts system’s highly available and redundant data storage capacity by approximately 90 Terabytes.

Particulars about several recent “behind the scenes” technology initiatives are available below.

Electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS)

Accommodating electronic filing and case management, eFACTS—a project developed by the Office of Information Technology Services (OIT, a unit of the Office of the State Courts Administrator), with assistance from the appellate clerks—is being piloted by the supreme court and the Second District Court of Appeal. eFACTS will replace the existing appellate courts’ case management systems, offering new and enhanced user features, including electronic document management, electronic workflows, electronic voting, remote access via a secured web application, tracking of administrative matters, assignment and working document tracking, calendaring, online docket, and secured access to case information. Since December 2018, eFACTS has also accommodated electronic filing via the ePortal.

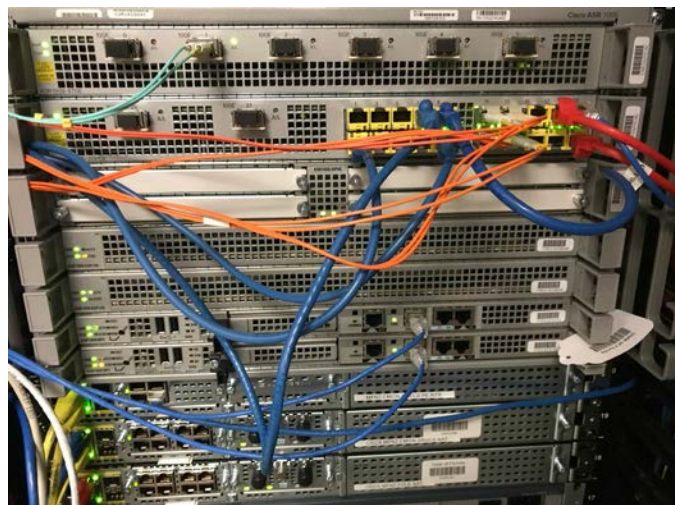
Application Modernization

The Application Modernization initiative is an effort to update and modernize existing applications within the Office of the State Courts Administrator. Many of these applications were outdated and running on old hardware; due to the age of the hardware, they were failing on a regular basis. The OIT has been in the process of moving the applications to modern hardware, also updating the code and adding enhancements (as well as providing “facelifts” for some applications so they look more modern). This modernization initiative

is allowing for better availability and monitoring of applications. Modernization efforts will continue with a look ahead to cloud service capabilities, ensuring that hardware and software remain up-to-date and functional.

Florida Courts Network Improvements

The OIT is improving the Florida courts statewide network operations. The network improvements provide advanced connectivity and enhanced services for all state courts users who rely on telecommunications services managed by the OIT. The core enhancements include additional network bandwidth for those who work in the courts and for the people they serve, with enhanced network services to expand court services, strengthened security for data transmission, and improved on-demand service features.



The new core router, a carrier grade device that serves as the core router for the state courts network, is capable of storing the routing tables for the entire world wide web.

Enhanced Availability of Document and Email Servers

The OIT has been improving the availability of services through the implementation of multiple access points for all file and email servers for the five district courts of appeal, the supreme court, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator. The enhanced availability of court business functions allows for uninterrupted access to documents and email should a server failure, a power failure, or a natural disaster take the primary site off-line.

PC Desktop Refresh

The OIT led the effort to refresh workstation computers for the Office of the State Courts Administrator, the supreme court, and the five district courts of appeal. The new computers are running modern operating systems and the latest work productivity software.



The five new Generation 9 servers (pictured in the bottom half of the photo) will replace more than 60 of the old Generation 6 servers (two of which are pictured at the top of the photo).

Emergency Preparedness

In November 2001, within two months of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, then Chief Justice Charles T. Wells established the [Workgroup on Emergency Preparedness](#), charging it with developing proposed action plans for the supreme court for a variety of emergency situations, “including natural disasters, terrorism, and extended information systems outages,” as well as with developing statewide emergency preparedness guidance for the entire judicial branch. He directed the workgroup to be guided by two policy goals: protect the health and safety of everyone inside the courts and keep the courts open to ensure justice for the people. For he recognized that the security of the facility and of everyone on its premises—from the judicial officers and

court staff working in the building to the court users conducting business within it—is central to the branch’s constitutional mandate to ensure that justice is administered without delay.

Emergency preparedness comprises preparation for unavoidable natural disasters, among them, pandemics, tropical storms, tornadoes, floods, and, of course, hurricanes (Florida is the nation’s most hurricane-prone state). It also encompasses preparing for human-made disasters and threats: calamities like oil spills, biohazards, protracted information systems outages, cyberattacks, and military or terrorist attack-related incidents. Preparing for hazards and menaces of all sorts is an unrelenting responsibility, and the judicial branch has taken a multi-pronged approach to meeting it: each court has developed a preparedness plan and a continuity of operations plan, and each court has designated a court emergency management team, an emergency coordinating officer, and a public information officer. The branch also has a Court Emergency Management Group that recommends policy for, prepares for, and responds to emergencies in the supreme court building and in state courts across Florida. In addition, more recently, the rise in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings prompted the supreme court to create the Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security and the Trial Court Security Workgroup, which were tasked with developing security standards of operation and best practices.



In October 2018, Hurricane Michael caused widespread devastation in the Panhandle. More than 50 miles north of the coast, the Jackson County Courthouse in Marianna suffered extensive damage to the building and grounds. In addition to blown windows, water intrusion, and roof damage, sign posts were bent in half, and most of the decades-old trees on the grounds suffered extensive damage. The courthouse was closed for over two months, and the constitutional offices were relocated throughout Marianna. Most of the first floor offices were able to move back into the courthouse in December, but the second floor will remain closed through July 2019.

Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Emergencies

Generally, Florida’s most perilous nature-induced disasters are hurricane-related, and in 2017 – 18, the branch’s emergency preparedness efforts were largely focused on readying for and recovering from the devastations wrought by Hurricane Irma in 2017 and Hurricane Michael in 2018. Irma made landfall in the Florida Keys in September 2017; 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. Every part of the state had court closures. And in October 2018, Michael struck the Panhandle, leaving a trail of devastation for 80 miles, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Georgia border: it blasted communities and their courts, taking lives, destroying property, and hamstringing communications and transportation. Thanks to the work of emergency responders, utility crews, the National Guard, and the local judges and court and county staff, within two-and-a-half weeks, courts in the Fourteenth Circuit and affected courts in the Second Circuit were able to open—but only with limited capacity.

The courts' emergency coordinating officers, who equip their courts to respond during emergencies or other disruptions, are always on-call. They hold conference calls routinely throughout the year, and, during hurricane season, they receive regular tropical updates; when crises strike, they work together to support the courts that have sustained damage. After Michael, for instance, the Fourteenth Circuit lacked any means of communication, and even some local law enforcement lacked communication means, so Mr. Steven Hall, chief of OSCA's General Services Unit and the branch's statewide emergency coordinating officer, together with staff from the Second Circuit, gathered up satellite phones for their use (roads were still impassable, so the Florida National Guard stepped up to deliver the phones to Panama City, where they were lent to court personnel and law enforcement). Moreover, recovery teams from courts across the state helped repair the technology infrastructure damaged in the storm. Looking back on the courts system's handling of these two hurricanes, Mr. Hall was able to offer several "lessons learned": in particular, he emphasized the importance of testing backup plans and procedures; the need to ensure each court has failover communication options; and the critical role of social media—especially Facebook and Twitter—in providing information to judges and court personnel from the days leading up to the storm, through its onslaught, and over the recovery period.

Court Security

Mass shootings are on the rise both in the United States and abroad. Also on the rise is anti-government violence, including a dramatic increase in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings. Because preparing for threats and emergencies is an ongoing requirement, the branch continues to develop strategies to ensure the safety of the public, judicial officers, and court personnel. Recent endeavors include the supreme court's creation, in September 2015, of the Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security and the August 2016 creation of the Trial Court Security Workgroup, under the auspices of the Judicial Management Council (for information about the latter, please see the above article on the [Judicial Management Council](#)).

Chaired by Florida Supreme Court Marshal Silvester Dawson, the Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security was directed to propose and develop best practices and standards for the appellate courts related to safety and



Hurricane Michael caused damage to judges' chambers on the top floor of the Bay County Courthouse in Panama City, and computers, furniture, carpet, and files were destroyed. Here, Chief Judge Elijah Smiley, Fourteenth Circuit, shows State Courts Administrator PK Jameson roof damage to the third floor of the courthouse, which was still exposed to the elements in December 2018.



Vast portions of Florida suffered flooding from Hurricane Irma, which made landfall in the Florida Keys in September 2017. The biggest problem for many of the state's courthouses was water damage, as was the case for this courtroom in the Charlotte County Justice Center.

security. Among the recommendations it presented in its final report, submitted to the supreme court in June 2018, the task force advanced a staffing methodology to be used in determining minimum security staffing; established the basic necessary security equipment that must be present at each district court of appeal; identified minimum staff training; and proposed a replacement schedule for equipment. The supreme court approved the task force's recommendations and encouraged each district court to implement them to the best of its ability.

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—and to promote the public's trust and confidence in the justice system—judicial officers and court staff must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve and perform at the highest levels of expertise. 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” and to maintain “high standards of professionalism and ethical behavior.”

Section Topics:

- Education for Judges and Quasi-Judicial Officers
- Education for Court Personnel
- Publications and Other Self-Learning Resources

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

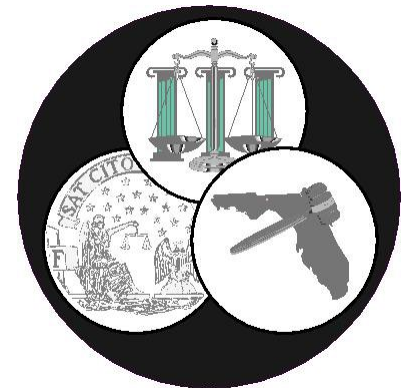
Various groups within the judicial branch develop high-quality education and training opportunities for the people who work in Florida's courts, making efficient and effective use of limited funding and staff resources. Among these groups are the many circuits and DCAs that design education programs for select categories of their own, and often neighboring, court personnel (e.g., court interpreters, staff attorneys, managers). In addition, members of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity regularly offer diversity education and training events for judges and court personnel, both locally and regionally. And several units of the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA)—most notably, the Office of Court Improvement, the Florida Dispute Resolution Center, the Innovations and Outreach Unit, the Court Services Unit, and the statewide ADA coordinator—commonly conduct or facilitate trainings for judicial officers and court employees. Readers can learn about this wealth of instructional offerings elsewhere in this annual report.

This section of the report focuses largely on the education programs and resources supported by the Florida Court Education Council (FCEC), 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 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 publications, distance learning events, and other self-learning resources. (For more information about continuing judicial education efforts in Florida, which were formalized in 1972, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).)

Education for Judges and Quasi-Judicial Officers

Florida's judges are required to earn a minimum of 30 approved credit hours of continuing judicial education every three years, and its new judges must satisfy additional requirements. The FCEC regularly works closely with the leaders of the judicial conferences and the judicial colleges to ensure that judges have opportunities to meet their education obligations.



Every year, each of the three judicial conferences coordinates an annual education program designed, in large part, to help sitting judges remain in compliance with the Rules of Judicial Administration and to keep them up-to-date on changes in the law. During the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, an annual education program was offered by the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida (approximately 300 county judges received training); the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges (approximately 500 circuit judges received training); and the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges (approximately 65 appellate judges received training).

Education programs were also offered by the two judicial colleges during the fiscal year. Approximately 50 judges, magistrates, and child support hearing officers attended the Florida Judicial College, a three-phase program that provides mandatory, bedrock training for those who are new to the bench (it also provides training for veteran judges who are switching to a new division): Phase I is a pre-bench program that includes a series of orientation sessions and a trial skills workshop; 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; and Phase III consists of a year-long mentoring program for new judges. Moreover, approximately 350 judges and magistrates attended the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, a comprehensive program for judges seeking to hone existing skills or to delve more deeply into advanced subject matters. During the course of the year, the FCEC also sponsored a DUI Adjudication Lab (55 participants) and a faculty training specialty course, a two-day program that teaches judges how to be more effective teachers of other judges (37 participants).

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, through its Florida Court Personnel Foundation, takes a creative approach to promoting access to and support for training for employees who work in the courts system: a decentralized



One of the highlights of the New Appellate Judges Program is “Lunch with the Supreme Court,” at which the justices share “words of wisdom” with the new appellate judges.

delivery system, the foundation model has been providing resources to local courts since 2008, enabling them to develop educational opportunities for their own employees based on their most pressing education and training needs.

In the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the foundation provided funding assistance for three statewide programs: a Court Security Coordinator Training, an Emergency Coordinating Officer Training, and a Florida Trial Court Staff Attorneys

Conference. Funding was also provided for 13 local training programs on topics such as How to Become a Great Communicator; Creating a Positive and Professional Work Environment; Customer Service Training; Managing Stress; and Opinion Writing and Advanced Legal Editing; further, several circuits offered trainings to help supervisors become better leaders. Also in the 2017 – 18 fiscal year, the FCEC supported the Trial Court Administrators Education Program (52 participants) and the Appellate Clerks and Marshals Education Program (18 participants).



After the new appellate judges watch a supreme court oral argument together, Fourth DCA Chief Judge Jonathan Gerber, the appellate dean of the New Appellate Judges Program, leads a session on Oral Arguments – Purposes and Professionalism.

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 diligently to update its repository of online publications during the fiscal year. Among those updated were *A Judge’s Guide to the Practices, Procedures, and Appropriate Use of General Magistrates*, *Child Support Enforcement Hearing Officers*, and *Special Magistrates Serving Within the Florida State Courts System*; *Acting as a Bar Referee Course Outline*; *An Aid to Understanding Canon 7*; *Contempt Benchguide*; *Duty Judge Manual*; *Florida Benchguide on Court Interpreting*; *Florida Small Claims Rules Annotated*; *Florida Traffic-Related Appellate Opinion Summaries* (updated quarterly); *Handling Florida Cases Involving Self-Represented Litigants: A Manual for Florida Courts*; *Interpersonal Violence Case Law Summaries – Civil and Criminal* (updated quarterly); *Judicial Administration Benchguide*; *Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee Opinions Topical Index* (updated quarterly); *Judicial Ethics Benchguide*; and *Voir Dire Outline*. A new publication—*The Consumer Law Bench Book*—was produced, and two new titles are forthcoming: *Automatic Stay Handbook for State Court Judges and Practitioners* and the *Criminal Benchguide for County Judges*.

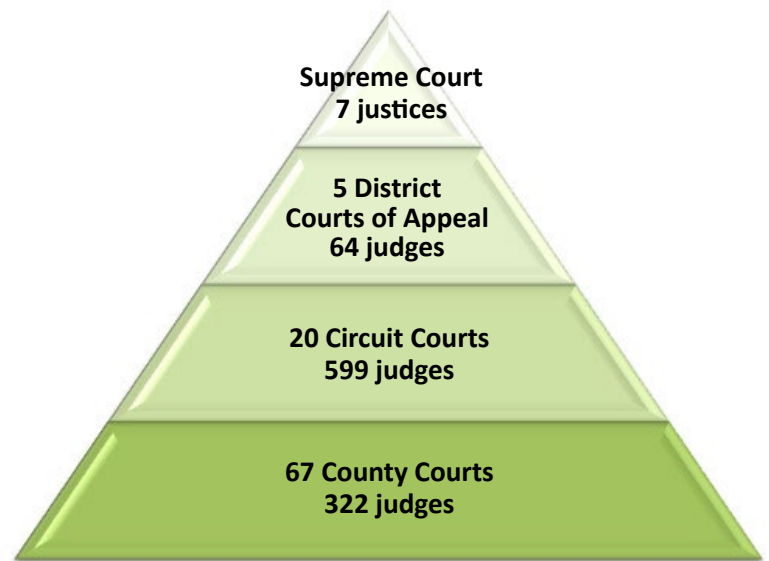
In addition, the Office of the State Courts Administrator is actively working to expand its menu of e-learning opportunities. Most recently, OSCA's Office of Court Improvement released a three-part e-learning series on *Medication-Assisted Treatment* as well as an e-learning module on *GRACE Court*, the Eleventh Circuit's Human Trafficking Court (the acronym stands for "Growth through Renewal, Acceptance, Change, and Empowerment"). And the Innovations and Outreach Unit, in coordination with other OSCA units, developed three new e-learning modules: *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* (with the Office of the General Counsel and Human Resources), *Records Access and Retention in an Electronic World* (with the Office of the General Counsel), and *IT Fundamentals: Password and Email Security* (with the Office of Information Technology Services). In focusing on e-learning, OSCA aims to respond to employees' eagerness for 24/7 on-demand delivery, short-live sessions, online and blended courses, and a space for learner communication and collaboration.

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:
 - First District: Tallahassee, 15 judges
 - Second District: Lakeland, 16 judges
 - Third District: Miami, 10 judges
 - Fourth District: West Palm Beach, 12 judges
 - Fifth 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

First District:	circuits 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 14
Second District:	circuits 6, 10, 12, 13, 20
Third District:	circuits 11, 16
Fourth District:	circuits 15, 17, 19
Fifth 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

COURT ADMINISTRATION

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.



Ms Patricia "PK" Jameson, State Courts Administrator from 2014 - 19.

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/>

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.html>

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. The Florida Supreme Court website can be found at <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/>. For links to the homepages of Florida's DCAs, go to <http://www.flcourts.org/florida-courts/district-court-appeal.html>

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) 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, [AOSC18-25](#), 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) 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 [AOSC18-22](#).

The Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC) 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

COURT COMMITTEES

that will effectively carry out the administration of justice. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.230 and [AOSC18-23](#).

[The Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability](#) (DCAP&A) 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 [AOSC18-24](#).

[The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability](#) (TCP&A) 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 [AOSC18-19](#).

[The Florida Courts Technology Commission](#) (FCTC) 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](#) was established to study the 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 [AOSC18-27](#) as well as the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#).

The Florida Court Education Council (FCEC) 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 [AOSC18-26](#) and [section 25.384, Florida Statutes](#).

The Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and Policy 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 [AOSC18-29](#).

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) 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 [AOSC18-30](#).

COURT COMMITTEES

[The Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts](#) addresses the needs of court-engaged individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders through the use of differentiated case management principles and other evidence-based and emerging best practices. For more information, see [AOSC18-32](#).

The Criminal Court Steering Committee 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 [AOSC18-20](#).

Workgroups/Task Forces

A workgroup or task force is appointed 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 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.

[The Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity](#) 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 [AOSC18-33](#).

The Appellate Court Technology Committee 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 assists the supreme court in facilitating the continued and timely implementation of eFACTS, a web-based application that accommodates electronic filing and case management. For more information, see [AOSC14-61](#).

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 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)].

COURT COMMITTEES

The Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee 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 [AOSC17-25](#).

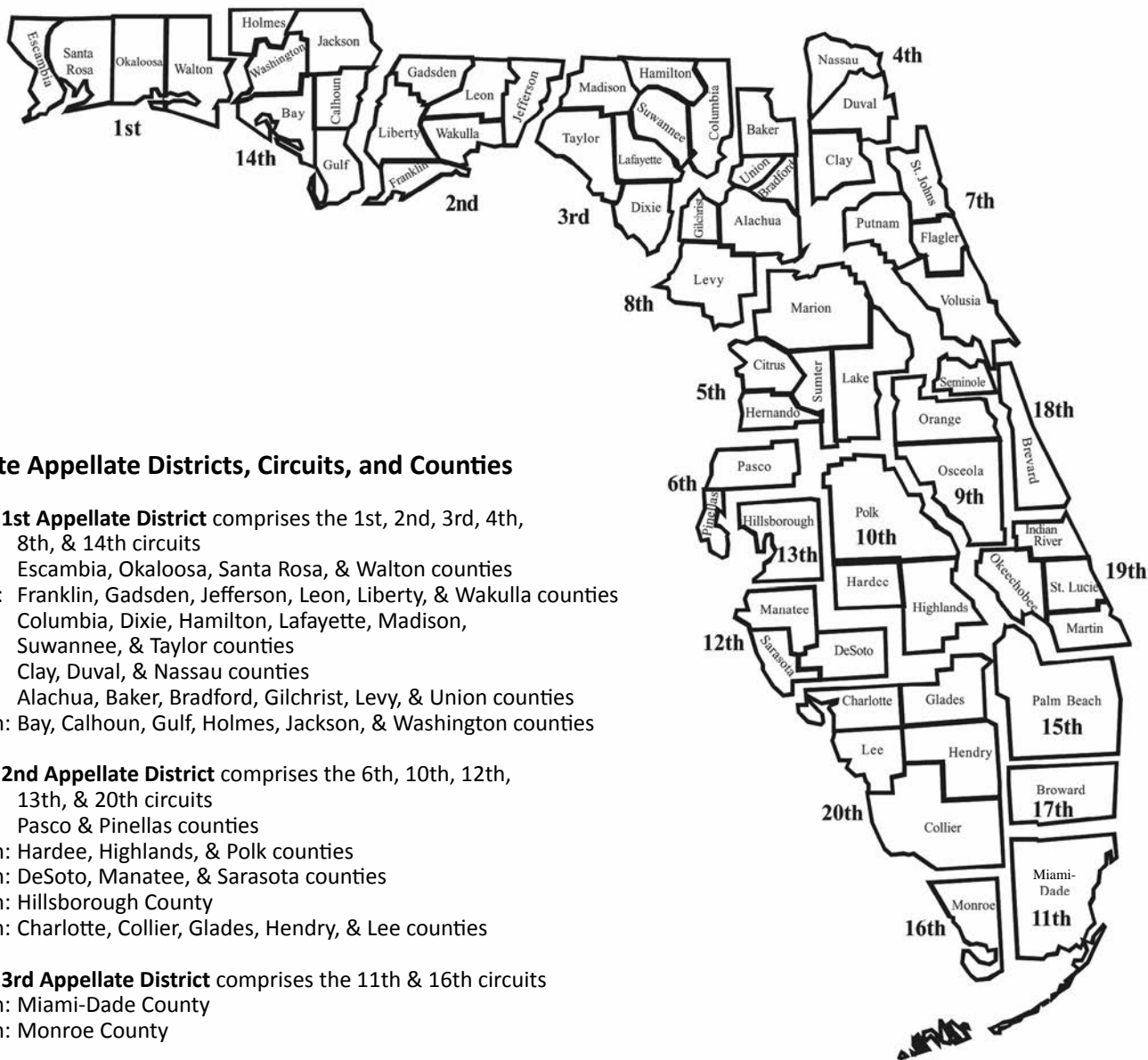
The Mediator Ethics Advisory Committee provides written advisory opinions to mediators concerning interpretations of the rules and guidance on standards of conduct. For more information, see [Florida Rule for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediators](#) 10.900(a).

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 [AOSC18-35](#).

The Court Interpreter Certification Board 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 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

JUDICIAL CERTIFICATION TABLE, 2009 - 2018

District Court of Appeal

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
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
2018	0	0	0	n/a	64

Circuit

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2010	40	37	0	0%	599
2012	31	23	0	0%	599
2014	24	7	0	0%	599
2016	13	1	0	0%	599
2018	8	2	0	0%	599

County

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
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
2018	7	2	0	0%	322

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.

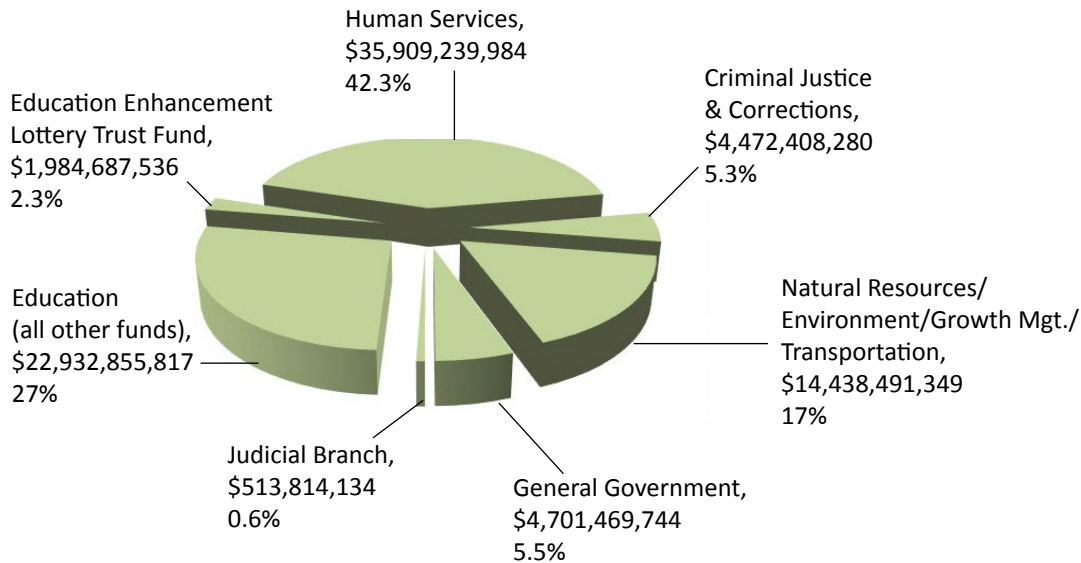
In a [November 2017 opinion](#), the Florida Supreme Court certified the need for four additional judges in the 2018 – 2019 fiscal year: two circuit judges and two county court judges; the court also decertified the need for 13 county court judges. However, the Florida Legislature did not approve any changes. (Note: in a [December 2018 opinion](#), the supreme court certified the need for four additional circuit judges and four additional county court judges in fiscal year 2019 – 2020.; it also decertified the need for three county court judges.)

FLORIDA'S BUDGET

FLORIDA'S BUDGET, FY 2017 - 2018 and FY 2018 - 2019

2017-2018 Fiscal Year

[\(For an accessible version of the FY 2017- 2018 and the FY 2018 - 2019 state budget, please follow this link\)](#)

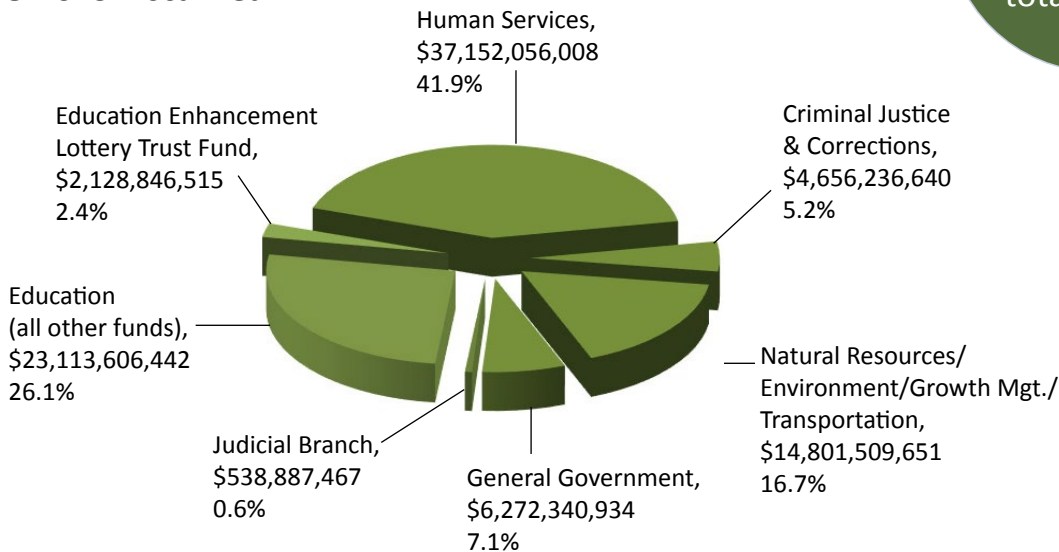


Total State Appropriations: \$84,952,966,844

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

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

2018-2019 Fiscal Year



Total State Appropriations: \$88,663,483,657

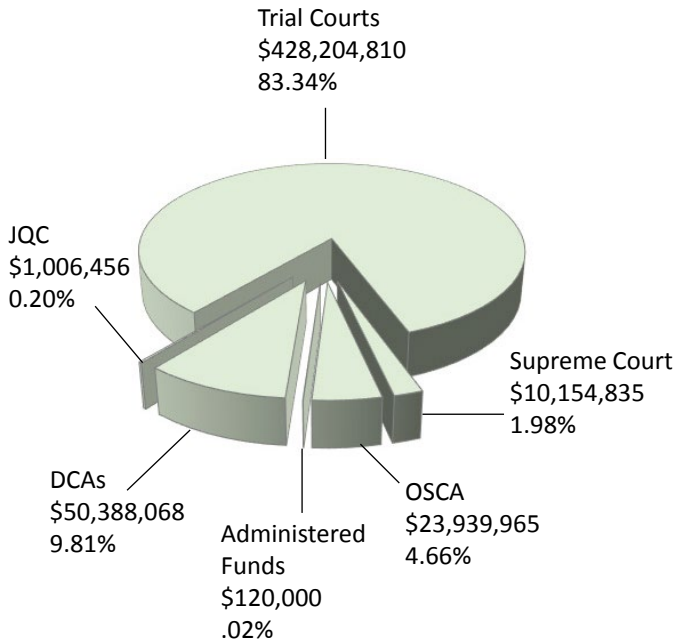
Note: This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, HB 5001, less vetoes.

STATE COURT SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS

STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS, FY 2017 - 2018 and FY 2018 - 2019

2017-2018 Fiscal Year

(For an accessible version of the FY 2017-18 and the FY 2018-19 appropriations, please follow this link.)



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

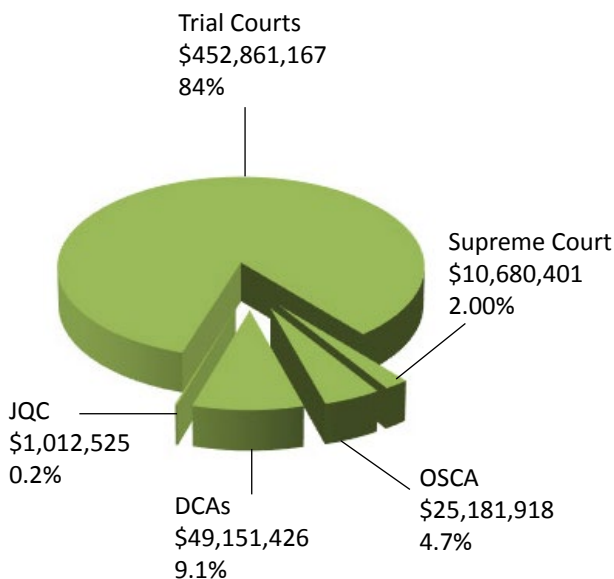
This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 2500, less the governor's vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$20.2 million for pass through/legislative project funding.]

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	\$441,085,380
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	\$1,398,025,757

Clerks of Court (County FY 2017 - 2018) \$409,399,995*

2018-2019 Fiscal Year



State Courts System Total: \$538,887,467

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, HB 5001, less the governor's vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$20 million for pass through/legislative project funding.]

Justice System Appropriations

State Courts System	\$538,887,467
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$104,470,044
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$51,479,985
State Attorneys	\$457,600,627
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$223,353,533
Public Defenders Appellate	\$16,591,443
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$10,861,005
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$48,100,464
Total	\$1,451,344,568

Clerks of Court (County FY 2018 - 2019) \$424,592,135*

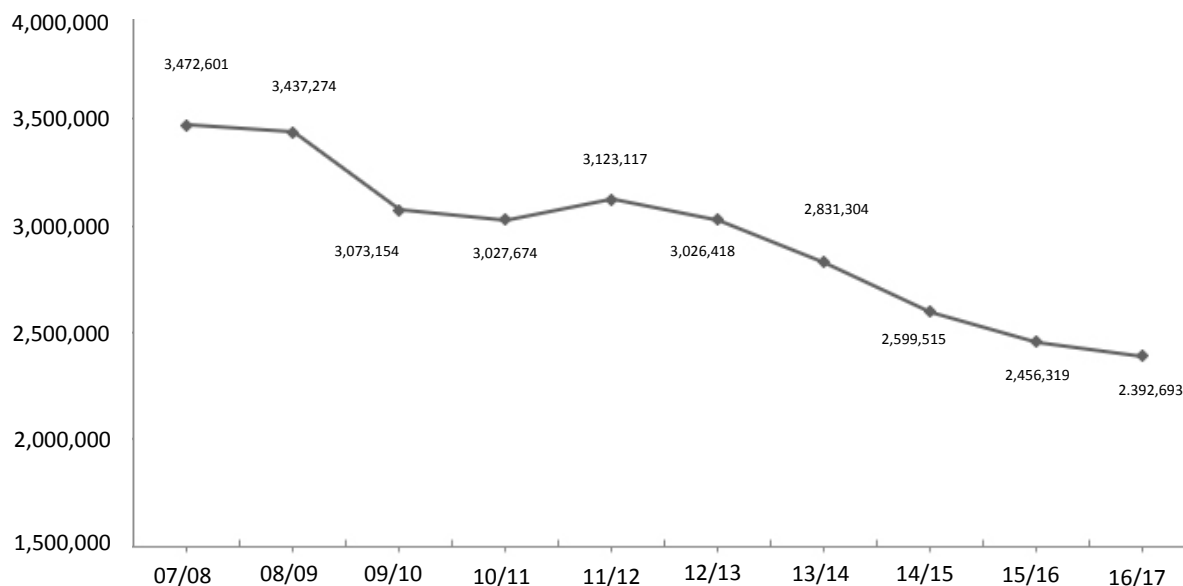
*Although not appropriated by the General Appropriations Act, the Clerks of Court budget is provided to demonstrate funding associated with performance of their court-related functions as specified in s. 28.35(3)(a). (Source: Florida Clerks of Court Operations Corporation)

FILINGS, FLORIDA COUNTY COURTS

FY 2007 - 2008 to FY 2016 - 2017*

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

Florida's county courts comprise two different divisions. The county criminal division includes three categories of criminal offenses: misdemeanors and ordinance violations, non-DUI criminal traffic, and driving under the influence. The county civil division includes five categories of civil cases: small claims (up to \$5,000), county civil (\$5,001 to \$15,000), other county civil, evictions, and civil traffic infractions. (Note: the supreme court recently approved increasing the small claims jurisdictional amount; plans for implementation are underway.)



Filings Overview

In keeping with national trends, Florida's county courts experienced pronounced declines in misdemeanor filings from 2007 to 2015; the declines are largely due to fewer arrests and increased diversionary methods.

The number of county civil filings has remained stable from 2009 to the present. Civil traffic infractions average 78% of this total, thus driving the overall trend.

Recent Trends

From FY 2015-16 to FY 2016-17, the county courts experienced a decrease of 2.6% in case filings. However, the county courts saw increases of 16.2% in small claims filings, 14.9% in county civil filings, and 12.8% in county ordinances filings.

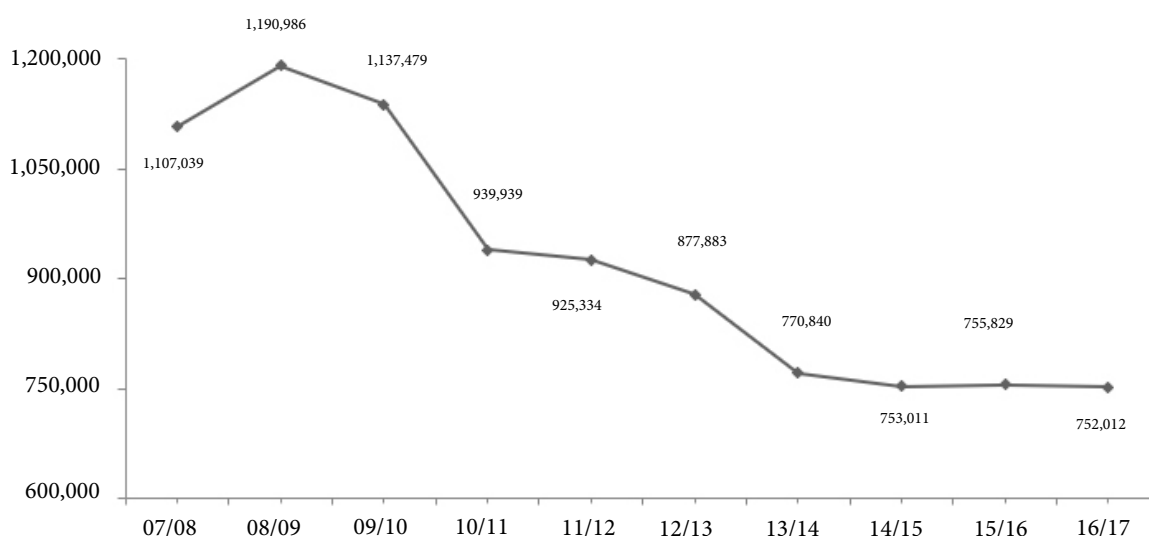
* All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification. [From this link, readers may access additional statistical information about Florida's courts.](#)

FILINGS, FLORIDA CIRCUIT COURTS

FY 2007 - 2008 to FY 2016 - 2017*

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

Florida's circuit courts comprise four different divisions. The circuit criminal division includes five categories of felony offenses: capital murder, serious crimes against persons, less serious crimes against persons, crimes against property, and drug offenses. The circuit civil division includes six categories of civil cases: professional malpractice and products liability, auto and other negligence, contract and indebtedness, real property, business disputes, and other circuit civil. The family court comprises eight categories of family court cases: simplified dissolution, dissolution, child support, orders for protection against violence, paternity, other domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, and juvenile dependency. And the probate division includes four categories of probate cases: probate, trusts, commitment acts, and guardianship.



Filings Overview

In 2007, recession-related case types, including contracts and foreclosures, began to increase. The 2010 foreclosure moratorium decreased these filings by 117%.

Nine years after the Great Recession, foreclosure filings returned to the normal filing trends that existed in 2006.

Recent Trends

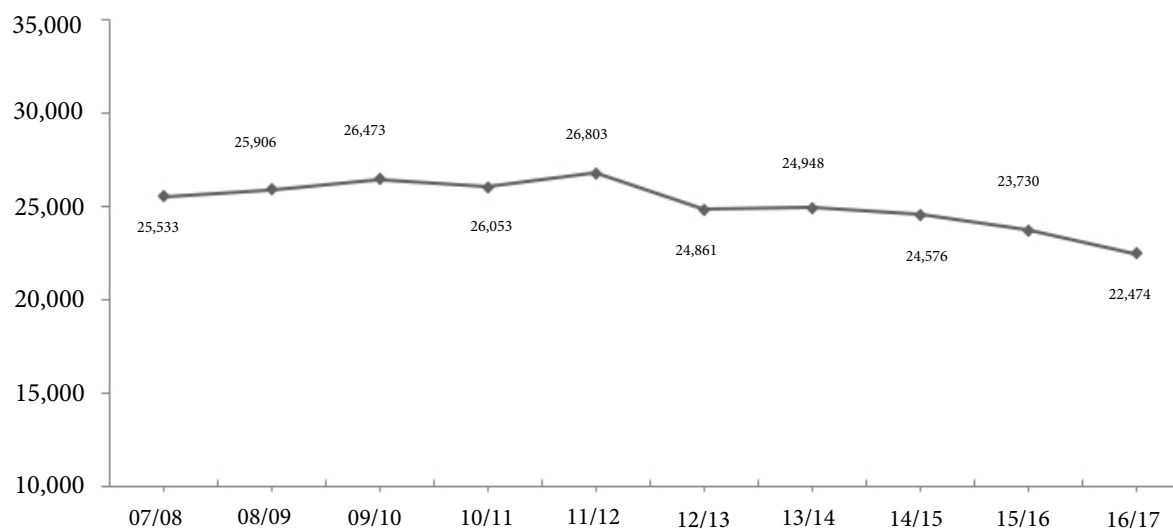
From FY 2015-16 to FY 2016-17, the circuit courts experienced a decrease of 0.5% in case filings. But the circuit courts saw increases of 19.0% in worthless checks filings, 15.0% in termination of parental rights filings, and 9.8% in auto negligence filings.

* All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.

FILINGS, FLORIDA DISTRICT COURTS OF APPEAL FY 2007 - 2008 to FY 2016 - 2017*

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

Florida's district courts of appeal decide all matters not directly appealable to the supreme court as well as final actions of state agencies. They hear seven categories of cases: administrative, civil, criminal, criminal post-conviction, family, juvenile, and probate/guardianship. In addition, the First District Court of Appeal hears all workers' compensation appeals.



Filings Overview

Decreasing appeals mirrored decreased filing trends in the trial courts.

Recent Trends

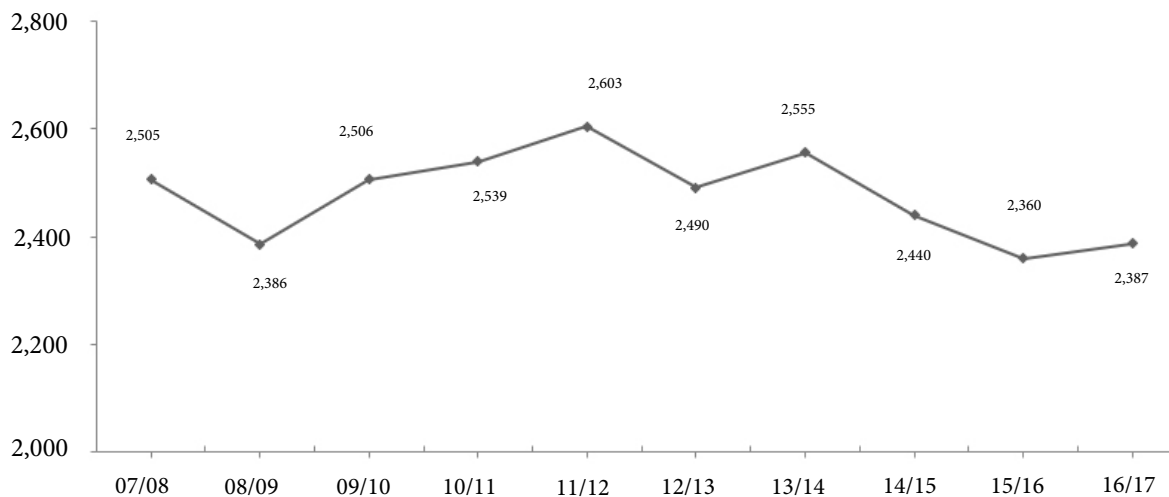
From FY 2015-16 to FY 2016-17, the district courts saw a decrease of 5.3% in case filings. Yet the district courts experienced increases of 13.8% in workers' compensation filings, 3.2% in juvenile filings, and 2.3% in administrative filings.

* All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.

FILINGS, FLORIDA SUPREME COURT FY 2007 - 2008 to FY 2016 - 2017*

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

The jurisdiction of the Florida Supreme Court is set out in the constitution. 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. In addition, at its discretion, the court may review certain other categories of cases if discretionary review is sought by a party.



Filings Overview

In 2012, the Florida Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of section 893.13, F.S., part of the Florida Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act (in *State v. Adkins*, 96 So. 3d 412 (Fla. 2012)), reducing petitions to have affected drug convictions overturned.

The recent filing increase is related to a law change requiring a unanimous jury for capital sentence, prompting filings challenging death sentences imposed prior to the law change.

Recent Trends

From FY 2015-16 to FY 2016-17, the supreme court experienced an increase of 1.1% in case filings. In addition, the supreme court saw an increase of 57.3% in post-conviction death penalty filings, 6.5% in other original jurisdiction filings, and 2.9% in Florida Bar case filings.

* All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification. For caseload statistics for the [Florida Supreme Court's annual filings and dispositions for 2000 - 2017, please follow this link.](#)

DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY, Notice of Appeal and Petition, FY 2016 - 2017

(All data provided below have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.)

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
All	Administrative	1,115
All	Civil	5,851
All	Criminal	8,002
All	Criminal Post-Conviction*	4,624
All	Family	1,298
All	Juvenile	1,141
All	Probate/Guardianship	220
All	Workers' Compensation	223
		30,476

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
1	Administrative	700
	Civil	962
	Criminal	2,125
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	1,060
	Family	249
	Juvenile	197
	Probate/Guardianship	28
	Workers' Compensation	223
		5,544

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
3	Administrative	88
	Civil	1,206
	Criminal	649
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	512
	Family	181
	Juvenile	208
	Probate/Guardianship	36
		2,880

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
5	Administrative	99
	Civil	916
	Criminal	1,733
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	1,053
	Family	275
	Juvenile	208
	Probate/Guardianship	22
		4,306

2	Administrative	128
	Civil	1,443
	Criminal	2,055
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	1,320
	Family	243
	Juvenile	292
	Probate/Guardianship	41
		5,522

4	Administrative	100
	Civil	1,324
	Criminal	1,440
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	679
	Family	350
	Juvenile	236
	Probate/Guardianship	93
		4,222

Total		22,474
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* Criminal post-conviction filings include notice of appeal only.

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2016 - 2017

(All data provided below have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.)

Circuit	County	Division	Total Filings
All	All	Adult Criminal	171,340
All	All	Civil	171,515
All	All	Family Court*	286,659
All	All	Probate	122,498
All	All	County Adult Criminal	583,951
All	All	County Civil**	1,808,742
			3,144,705

* 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 in infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2016 - 2017

(All data provided below have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.)

Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings
1	Adult Criminal	11,638	8	Adult Criminal	3,959	15	Adult Criminal	8,740
	Civil	4,641		Civil	2,128		Civil	13,964
	Family Court*	12,309		Family Court*	5,234		Family Court*	14,227
	Probate	5,290		Probate	2,768		Probate	8,531
	County Adult Criminal	25,231		County Adult Criminal	11,075		County Adult Criminal	56,064
	County Civil**	23,943		County Civil**	20,581		County Civil**	133,378
		83,052			45,745			234,904
2	Adult Criminal	4,461	9	Adult Criminal	12,435	16	Adult Criminal	1,170
	Civil	3,446		Civil	14,382		Civil	737
	Family Court*	6,226		Family Court*	24,984		Family Court*	1,302
	Probate	3,123		Probate	7,228		Probate	506
	County Adult Criminal	19,492		County Adult Criminal	37,670		County Adult Criminal	3,312
	County Civil**	17,741		County Civil**	119,840		County Civil**	10,983
		54,489			216,539			18,010
3	Adult Criminal	2,760	10	Adult Criminal	10,106	17	Adult Criminal	12,524
	Civil	1,097		Civil	5,176		Civil	22,673
	Family Court*	3,584		Family Court*	15,014		Family Court*	29,364
	Probate	1,152		Probate	5,654		Probate	8,703
	County Adult Criminal	5,219		County Adult Criminal	23,575		County Adult Criminal	52,469
	County Civil**	11,915		County Civil**	33,299		County Civil**	246,493
		25,727			92,824			372,226
4	Adult Criminal	8,020	11	Adult Criminal	13,155	18	Adult Criminal	8,989
	Civil	9,054		Civil	32,113		Civil	6,553
	Family Court*	19,421		Family Court*	32,305		Family Court*	12,845
	Probate	5,408		Probate	12,677		Probate	5,721
	County Adult Criminal	37,834		County Adult Criminal	64,143		County Adult Criminal	28,658
	County Civil**	144,101		County Civil**	587,934		County Civil**	56,446
		223,838			742,327			119,212
5	Adult Criminal	9,534	12	Adult Criminal	6,086	19	Adult Criminal	5,318
	Civil	7,311		Civil	4,540		Civil	4,571
	Family Court*	15,910		Family Court*	8,817		Family Court*	7,885
	Probate	8,377		Probate	6,765		Probate	4,408
	County Adult Criminal	21,846		County Adult Criminal	17,663		County Adult Criminal	16,268
	County Civil**	42,325		County Civil**	34,028		County Civil**	31,237
		105,303			77,899			69,687
6	Adult Criminal	16,604	13	Adult Criminal	12,958	20	Adult Criminal	7,586
	Civil	11,517		Civil	11,345		Civil	7,958
	Family Court*	19,780		Family Court*	21,757		Family Court*	17,170
	Probate	10,718		Probate	8,438		Probate	8,849
	County Adult Criminal	44,651		County Adult Criminal	39,036		County Adult Criminal	31,845
	County Civil**	68,171		County Civil**	103,994		County Civil**	56,278
		171,441			197,528			129,686
7	Adult Criminal	9,182	14	Adult Criminal	6,115	Total		3,144,705
	Civil	6,354		Civil	1,955			
	Family Court*	13,084		Family Court*	5,441			
	Probate	6,229		Probate	1,953			
	County Adult Criminal	33,539		County Adult Criminal	14,361			
	County Civil**	53,267		County Civil**	12,788			
		121,655			42,613			

* 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 in infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION, FY 2016 - 2017

(All data provided below have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.)

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
1 Escambia	Adult Criminal	5,692	2 Leon	Adult Criminal	2,924	3 Madison	Adult Criminal	313
	Civil	1,918		Civil	2,707		Civil	102
	Family Court*	5,485		Family Court*	4,550		Family Court*	305
	Probate	2,871		Probate	2,277		Probate	144
	County Adult Criminal	11,407		County Adult Criminal	16,118		County Adult Criminal	689
	County Civil**	9,768		County Civil**	12,678		County Civil**	3,026
		37,141			41,254			4,579
1 Okaloosa	Adult Criminal	2,886	2 Liberty	Adult Criminal	155	3 Suwannee	Adult Criminal	560
	Civil	1,202		Civil	42		Civil	236
	Family Court*	3,502		Family Court*	122		Family Court*	839
	Probate	1,245		Probate	37		Probate	253
	County Adult Criminal	6,126		County Adult Criminal	227		County Adult Criminal	836
	County Civil**	5,326		County Civil**	267		County Civil**	1,432
		20,287			850			4,156
1 Santa Rosa	Adult Criminal	2,124	2 Wakulla	Adult Criminal	355	3 Taylor	Adult Criminal	323
	Civil	925		Civil	207		Civil	110
	Family Court*	2,206		Family Court*	501		Family Court*	425
	Probate	814		Probate	149		Probate	126
	County Adult Criminal	4,859		County Adult Criminal	760		County Adult Criminal	703
	County Civil**	7,001		County Civil**	757		County Civil**	949
		17,929			2,729			2,636
1 Walton	Adult Criminal	936	3 Columbia	Adult Criminal	954	4 Clay	Adult Criminal	1,490
	Civil	596		Civil	451		Civil	1,255
	Family Court*	1,116		Family Court*	1,303		Family Court*	2,835
	Probate	360		Probate	429		Probate	634
	County Adult Criminal	2,839		County Adult Criminal	1,916		County Adult Criminal	3,646
	County Civil**	1,848		County Civil**	2,987		County Civil**	13,807
		7,695			8,040			23,667
2 Franklin	Adult Criminal	269	3 Dixie	Adult Criminal	209	4 Duval	Adult Criminal	5,844
	Civil	108		Civil	81		Civil	7,424
	Family Court*	233		Family Court*	265		Family Court*	15,351
	Probate	113		Probate	101		Probate	4,410
	County Adult Criminal	847		County Adult Criminal	397		County Adult Criminal	32,080
	County Civil**	325		County Civil**	680		County Civil**	127,620
		1,895			1,733			192,729
2 Gadsden	Adult Criminal	572	3 Hamilton	Adult Criminal	323	4 Nassau	Adult Criminal	686
	Civil	286		Civil	94		Civil	375
	Family Court*	655		Family Court*	328		Family Court*	1,235
	Probate	467		Probate	51		Probate	364
	County Adult Criminal	1,165		County Adult Criminal	590		County Adult Criminal	2,108
	County Civil**	2,956		County Civil**	2,519		County Civil**	2,674
		6,101			3,905			7,442
2 Jefferson	Adult Criminal	186	3 Lafayette	Adult Criminal	78	5 Citrus	Adult Criminal	1,080
	Civil	96		Civil	23		Civil	1,008
	Family Court*	165		Family Court*	119		Family Court*	2,060
	Probate	80		Probate	48		Probate	907
	County Adult Criminal	375		County Adult Criminal	88		County Adult Criminal	1,841
	County Civil**	758		County Civil**	322		County Civil**	3,741
		1,660			678			10,637

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

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COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
5 Hernando	Adult Criminal	1,903	7 St. Johns	Adult Criminal	1,415	9 Orange	Adult Criminal	9,643
	Civil	1,383		Civil	1,382		Civil	11,241
	Family Court*	3,030		Family Court*	2,600		Family Court*	20,054
	Probate	2,295		Probate	1,058		Probate	5,587
	County Adult Criminal	3,986		County Adult Criminal	4,667		County Adult Criminal	30,834
	County Civil**	10,788		County Civil**	9,015		County Civil**	97,470
		23,385			20,137			174,829
5 Lake	Adult Criminal	2,624	7 Volusia	Adult Criminal	6,006	9 Osceola	Adult Criminal	2,792
	Civil	2,154		Civil	3,675		Civil	3,141
	Family Court*	4,030		Family Court*	7,841		Family Court*	4,930
	Probate	2,166		Probate	4,163		Probate	1,641
	County Adult Criminal	7,024		County Adult Criminal	23,333		County Adult Criminal	6,836
	County Civil**	14,000		County Civil**	40,252		County Civil**	22,370
		31,998			85,270			41,710
5 Marion	Adult Criminal	3,038	8 Alachua	Adult Criminal	2,301	10 Hardee	Adult Criminal	327
	Civil	2,366		Civil	1,404		Civil	128
	Family Court*	6,049		Family Court*	3,110		Family Court*	417
	Probate	2,458		Probate	2,034		Probate	118
	County Adult Criminal	6,776		County Adult Criminal	7,104		County Adult Criminal	1,138
	County Civil**	9,941		County Civil**	15,150		County Civil**	1,884
		30,628			31,103			4,012
5 Sumter	Adult Criminal	889	8 Baker	Adult Criminal	298	10 Highlands	Adult Criminal	1,029
	Civil	400		Civil	144		Civil	588
	Family Court*	741		Family Court*	439		Family Court*	1,282
	Probate	551		Probate	208		Probate	949
	County Adult Criminal	2,219		County Adult Criminal	837		County Adult Criminal	1,798
	County Civil**	3,855		County Civil**	1,123		County Civil**	2,412
		8,655			3,049			8,058
6 Pasco	Adult Criminal	6,012	8 Bradford	Adult Criminal	566	10 Polk	Adult Criminal	8,750
	Civil	3,971		Civil	174		Civil	4,460
	Family Court*	6,987		Family Court*	491		Family Court*	13,315
	Probate	3,507		Probate	128		Probate	4,587
	County Adult Criminal	12,497		County Adult Criminal	1,193		County Adult Criminal	20,639
	County Civil**	19,681		County Civil**	1,521		County Civil**	29,003
		52,655			4,073			80,754
6 Pinellas	Adult Criminal	10,592	8 Gilchrist	Adult Criminal	202	11 Miami-Dade	Adult Criminal	13,155
	Civil	7,546		Civil	77		Civil	32,113
	Family Court*	12,793		Family Court*	284		Family Court*	32,305
	Probate	7,211		Probate	69		Probate	12,677
	County Adult Criminal	32,154		County Adult Criminal	362		County Adult Criminal	64,143
	County Civil**	48,490		County Civil**	647		County Civil**	587,934
		118,786			1,641			742,327
7 Flagler	Adult Criminal	646	8 Levy	Adult Criminal	466	12 Desoto	Adult Criminal	479
	Civil	799		Civil	241		Civil	165
	Family Court*	1,313		Family Court*	715		Family Court*	660
	Probate	577		Probate	207		Probate	123
	County Adult Criminal	3,180		County Adult Criminal	1,311		County Adult Criminal	840
	County Civil**	1,414		County Civil**	1,758		County Civil**	929
		7,929			4,698			3,196
7 Putnam	Adult Criminal	1,115	8 Union	Adult Criminal	126	12 Manatee	Adult Criminal	2,654
	Civil	498		Civil	88		Civil	1,846
	Family Court*	1,330		Family Court*	195		Family Court*	4,314
	Probate	431		Probate	122		Probate	1,959
	County Adult Criminal	2,359		County Adult Criminal	268		County Adult Criminal	8,009
	County Civil**	2,586		County Civil**	382		County Civil**	9,692
		8,319			1,181			28,474

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

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COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
12 Sarasota	Adult Criminal	2,953	15 Palm Beach	Adult Criminal	8,740	19 Okeechobee	Adult Criminal	614
	Civil	2,529		Civil	13,964		Civil	231
	Family Court*	3,843		Family Court*	14,227		Family Court*	835
	Probate	4,683		Probate	8,531		Probate	198
	County Adult Criminal	8,814		County Adult Criminal	56,064		County Adult Criminal	1,307
	County Civil**	23,407		County Civil**	133,378		County Civil**	1,427
		46,229			234,904			4,612
13 Hillsborough	Adult Criminal	12,958	16 Monroe	Adult Criminal	1,170	19 St. Lucie	Adult Criminal	2,442
	Civil	11,345		Civil	737		Civil	2,061
	Family Court*	21,757		Family Court*	1,302		Family Court*	3,746
	Probate	8,438		Probate	506		Probate	2,368
	County Adult Criminal	39,036		County Adult Criminal	3,312		County Adult Criminal	6,699
	County Civil**	103,994		County Civil**	10,983		County Civil**	15,230
		197,528			18,010			32,546
14 Bay	Adult Criminal	3,959	17 Broward	Adult Criminal	12,524	20 Charlotte	Adult Criminal	1,242
	Civil	1,306		Civil	22,673		Civil	1,112
	Family Court*	3,272		Family Court*	29,364		Family Court*	2,582
	Probate	1,135		Probate	8,703		Probate	2,006
	County Adult Criminal	11,132		County Adult Criminal	52,469		County Adult Criminal	3,824
	County Civil**	7,868		County Civil**	246,493		County Civil**	5,773
		28,672			372,226			16,539
14 Calhoun	Adult Criminal	310	18 Brevard	Adult Criminal	6,100	20 Collier	Adult Criminal	1,528
	Civil	77		Civil	3,637		Civil	2,298
	Family Court*	277		Family Court*	7,601		Family Court*	3,166
	Probate	86		Probate	3,312		Probate	2,228
	County Adult Criminal	238		County Adult Criminal	16,143		County Adult Criminal	7,424
	County Civil**	610		County Civil**	21,055		County Civil**	13,282
		1,598			57,848			29,926
14 Gulf	Adult Criminal	246	18 Seminole	Adult Criminal	2,889	20 Glades	Adult Criminal	125
	Civil	103		Civil	2,916		Civil	39
	Family Court*	207		Family Court*	5,244		Family Court*	119
	Probate	92		Probate	2,409		Probate	44
	County Adult Criminal	433		County Adult Criminal	12,515		County Adult Criminal	325
	County Civil**	256		County Civil**	35,391		County Civil**	1,998
		1,337			61,364			2,650
14 Holmes	Adult Criminal	443	19 Indian River	Adult Criminal	1,115	20 Hendry	Adult Criminal	479
	Civil	75		Civil	900		Civil	179
	Family Court*	372		Family Court*	1,606		Family Court*	704
	Probate	130		Probate	955		Probate	120
	County Adult Criminal	548		County Adult Criminal	3,139		County Adult Criminal	1,952
	County Civil**	620		County Civil**	6,029		County Civil**	2,342
		2,188			13,744			5,776
14 Jackson	Adult Criminal	722	19 Martin	Adult Criminal	1,147	20 Lee	Adult Criminal	4,212
	Civil	281		Civil	1,379		Civil	4,330
	Family Court*	869		Family Court*	1,698		Family Court*	10,599
	Probate	360		Probate	887		Probate	4,451
	County Adult Criminal	1,220		County Adult Criminal	5,123		County Adult Criminal	18,320
	County Civil**	2,709		County Civil**	8,551		County Civil**	32,883
		6,161			18,785			74,795
14 Washington	Adult Criminal	435						
	Civil	113						
	Family Court*	444						
	Probate	150						
	County Adult Criminal	790						
	County Civil**	725						
		2,657						

* 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 in infraction filings involving a judge or hearing officer.

COURT CONTACTS FOR 2019

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

Chief Justice CHARLES T. CANADY (850) 410-8092
Clerk John A. Tomasino (850) 922-5468
Marshal Silvester Dawson (850) 922-6204
Interim SC Administrator Elisabeth H. Kiel (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 KEVIN EMAS (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 KERRY I. EVANDER (386) 947-1518
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) 606-4420
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 Charles Hydovitz (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 JAMES P. NILON (352) 384-3081
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
Acting Court Administrator Sandria Garcia (305) 349-7001
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 2019

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 TONYA RAINWATER (321) 617-7283

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 Patty Harris (772) 807-4381

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/>

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