

2018-2019

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# FLORIDA STATE COURTS

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*Annual Report*



Lady Justice shines through the etched glass seal inside the entrance to the Florida Supreme Court Building.

# The Supreme Court of Florida

## Florida State Courts Annual Report

July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019



Charles T. Canady

*Chief Justice*

Ricky Polston

Jorge Labarga

C. Alan Lawson

Barbara Lagoa

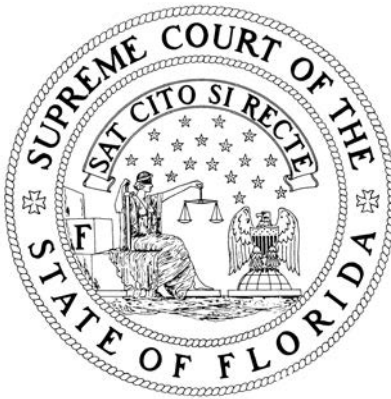
Robert J. Luck

Carlos G. Muñiz

*Justices*

Lisa H. Kiel

*State Courts Administrator*



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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

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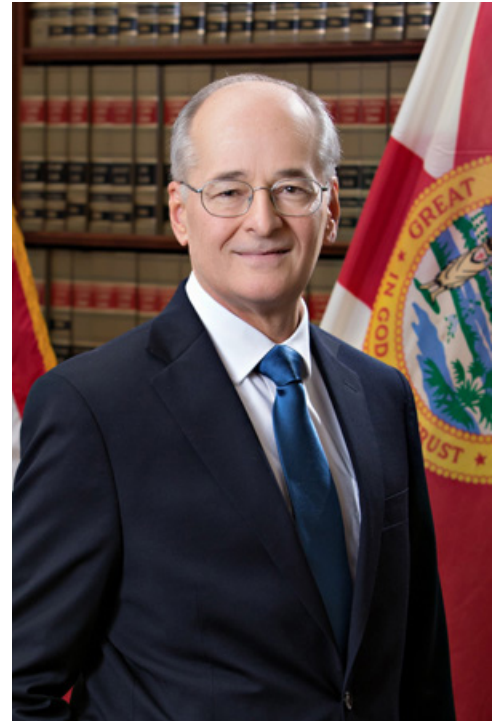
Reflecting on the last year or so, I can say with certainty that Florida's judicial branch experienced more transitions in 2019 than in any other year since my appointment to the supreme court in 2008. The changes began in early 2019. Having reached mandatory retirement age for Florida's judges and justices, our three senior supreme court jurists—Justices Barbara Pariente, R. Fred Lewis, and Peggy Quince—left the bench right after the new year began. But this loss was quickly followed by its complement: before the month came to a close, Justices Barbara Lagoa, Robert Luck, and Carlos Muñoz were appointed to join my three remaining colleagues and me on the bench.

Then in February, our state courts administrator, Ms PK Jameson, returned to work in the Florida Legislature; the court appreciates Ms Jameson's service to the branch over the nearly five years she served as our courts administrator. Fortunately, Ms Lisa Kiel was able to step seamlessly into that role. Ms Kiel, whom many of you will remember by her former surname, Lisa Goodner, began working in the courts system in 1990 and was our state courts administrator from 2003 until her "first retirement" in 2014. Because of her long familiarity with the demands of the job and her breadth of knowledge about judicial relations with the other branches of government, the other justices and I felt she was the ideal choice, and we are all very pleased to have her back.

Alone, these changes, both sad and auspicious, would have been quite enough for us to navigate. But we soon discovered that our season of transitions was not yet over. In September 2019, Justices Lagoa and Luck were nominated to the US Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit; in November, they were confirmed by the senate and resigned from the supreme court soon thereafter. Although this was a big loss for our branch and our state, the federal court's gain speaks volumes about the reputation and caliber of Florida's judges. These positions will not be vacant for long, however: the Florida Supreme Court Nominating Commission has already interviewed an impressive pool of applicants, and I have no doubt that Florida will be well served by the jurists chosen to join the supreme court.

In the pages that follow, you can learn about many of the other transitions Florida's judicial branch has been embracing recently. Most of these changes spring from the innovative ideas and the hard work of our court committees. The Judicial Management Council has been the impetus for quite a few of these transformations. For instance, the council's recommendations regarding the small claims jurisdictional limit and the county court jurisdictional limit helped shape the move to increase the small claims threshold from \$5,000 to \$8,000 and to increase the county court threshold from \$15,000 to \$30,000 (effective January 1, 2020). Also, after studying several concerns evolving from our practice of having circuit courts hear appeals from county court decisions, the council proposed the transfer of the circuit courts' appellate and related extraordinary writ authority to the district courts of appeal; the supreme court is currently supporting legislation to effect this change. The council is now working on ways to resolve civil cases in a more timely manner, so changes are also on the horizon for civil case management practices and procedures. You can read about these important developments—and more—below.

Other court committees have also been working industriously to facilitate positive change. Thanks to the work of the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability and the Trial Court Budget Commission,



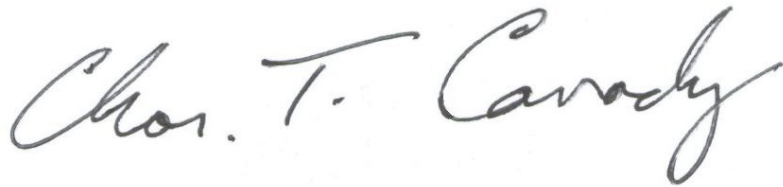
## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

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for example, shared remote interpreting services are now available in 16 of Florida's 20 circuits; through this initiative, the branch has better positioned itself to meet the growing need for qualified court interpreters. Also, the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability, in conjunction with the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and Policy, recently launched an online dispute resolution pilot in six counties; this new way of resolving cases holds out the promise of preserving the time and resources both of litigants and the court.

This report also has much to reveal to readers who want to know how changes in technology are transforming the way the branch meets the needs of everyone who works in, or has business in, a Florida courthouse (whether physically or virtually). You can read about many of our technology initiatives in this report, including our new electronic notification program, our livescan fingerprinting pilot, and our use of open-source technology to reduce startup costs and ongoing licensing expenses. The advances I've been describing are just a sampling of the many innovations this report explores.

You will see that, even with all the personnel transitions we've been facing, our ship has held steady. I want to thank my fellow justices and Ms Kiel for helping to make that possible. But I also want to thank our many judges and court personnel, who work tirelessly to carry out the mission and vision of Florida's courts. As chief justice, it is my honor to work with them, and I thank them for all they do every day to make access to justice a reality for the people we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Char. T. Canady". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

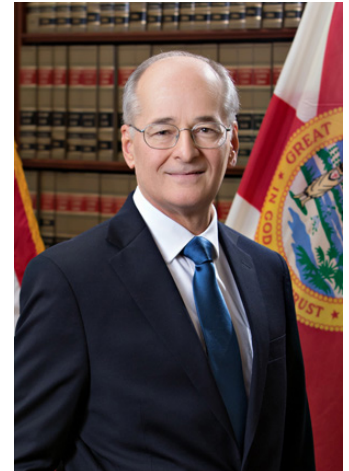
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## **Charles T. Canady** Chief Justice

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

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## **Jorge Labarga** Justice

Justice Labarga was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in January 2009; the second Hispanic to sit on the court, he 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 have two children.



## **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.



# FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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## **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. She left the court in December 2019, when she received her commission as a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.



## **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.

Justice Luck and his wife Jennifer have two children. He served on the court until November 2019, when he was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.



# FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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## **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.



[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

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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, 2018 – June 30, 2019: The Year in Review

“Courts rely on public trust and confidence as the source of their effectiveness. Public confidence in the judicial branch is directly related to the courts’ ability to fulfill their mission. However, people don’t trust what they don’t understand,” the [Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida](#) states. Thus, education—providing Floridians with forums for learning about the functions, processes, and accomplishments of their courts—is critical: as studies have repeatedly shown, when people have some insight into the workings of the justice system and appreciate the role of the courts within it, they are more likely to trust and support the judicial branch.

Through its development of educational materials and programs, outreach initiatives, publications, enhanced web content, videos, mobile apps, social media messages, and other communication strategies, Florida’s judicial branch has been working to create a multi-textured menu of opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the 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; and
- 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 the [Court Communication Plan](#)). In providing readers with a chance to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the third branch of government, this report 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.*

In its vision statement, the Florida judicial branch crystallizes its commitment to serving justice fairly and to governing 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 work resolutely 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.

## Long-Range Issue #1 Topics:

- State Courts System Funding
- Performance and Accountability
- Judicial Management Council
- 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. Judges and court staff are intent on 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 ongoing. When courts have outstanding, critical funding needs, not only are judges, staff, and courtrooms affected. Also affected 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 Florida’s aging courthouses, which are often beleaguered by safety or security issues that can put people in harm’s way (the state is responsible for the appellate courthouses, and counties are responsible for the trial court courthouses). 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 2018 – 2019 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 Parkland shooting on February 14, 2018, 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 worthy projects that were not included in the courts system's legislative budget request. These projects included funding for 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.

## Funding for the 2019 – 2020 Fiscal Year

Despite the modest surplus lawmakers were working with for the 2019 – 20 fiscal year budget cycle, and despite the small surplus anticipated for fiscal year 2020 – 21, deficits are projected for the two fiscal years that follow. Consequentially, state economists recommended that lawmakers budget the 2019 – 20 surplus with caution, especially given the high costs associated with Hurricane Michael recovery and the possibility of a recession, among other issues.

For the 2019 – 20 fiscal year, the legislature passed a \$91.1 billion spending plan (of which the governor vetoed \$131.3 million). The judicial branch was appropriated \$554.8 million. (Note: this figured included \$24 million for pass through/legislative project funding.)

The budget fully funded one of the courts system's top priorities: \$10.3 million in recurring salary dollars to address recruitment, retention, and equity salary issues affecting non-judge court employees. The budget specified that the funding is for position classification salary adjustments to encourage retention; to equalize salaries between the judicial branch and other public and private sector employers for similar positions and



Florida's chief judges meet regularly to discuss topics of import to the branch—issues like court funding, court-related legislation, administrative matters, and new court initiatives. Here, at the June 2019 meeting, after being briefed about the recently passed state budget, court leaders listen to a technology update from the chair of the Florida Courts Technology Commission, Judge Lisa T. Munyon, Ninth Circuit.

duties; and to remedy recurring recruitment and retention problems for specific position classifications. Based on recommendations from the Trial Court Budget Commission, the District Court of Appeal Budget Commission, and the state courts administrator, Chief Justice Canady submitted a plan to the Legislative Budget Commission, which was approved and implemented in October 2019. Judges cannot do the work they are called on to do without appropriate staff support, the chief justice frequently points out, saying that branch leaders are “very grateful to the legislature for making this funding available to us.”



In addition to the \$10.3 million, the judicial branch received appropriations for several other budget requests, including funding for a docking station for a standby generator at the supreme court building; a storm window upgrade for the Fifth District Court of Appeal (to address substantial water intrusion damage resulting from Hurricane Irma, which struck in September 2017, causing destruction in every part of the state); operational and technical support for the Access to Justice – Do It Yourself Florida project (an initiative designed to meet the needs of underserved self-represented litigants); a range of emergency management, disaster recovery, and information technology security issues; and enhancements to a problem-solving court case management system.

The budget also funded four new judgeships: two circuit judgeships (one in the Ninth and one in the Twelfth circuits) and two county judgeships (one in Flagler and one in Citrus counties). It also funded associated judicial assistant and law clerk positions. (This link goes to the December 2018 supreme court opinion, [Certification of Need for Additional Judges](#). In the opinion, the court certified the need for four additional circuit judgeships—two in the Ninth, one in the First, and one in the Fourteenth circuits; it also certified the need for four additional county court judgeships in Hillsborough County; and it decertified the need for two county court judgeships—one in Brevard County and one in Pasco County.)

Lawmakers also funded various commendable projects that the courts system had not included in its legislative budget request. For instance, funding was appropriated for senior judge support; information technology support (to provide text alerts for court appearance and fee reminders); the Jackson County Courthouse (for Hurricane Michael repairs) and the Liberty County Courthouse (for an electrical upgrade); and problem-solving courts.

## Looking Ahead

In preparation for the 2020 legislative session, the judicial branch developed a fiscal year 2020 – 21 budget request that meets critical needs in areas such as appellate court facilities and security; timely resolution of civil and family cases in the trial courts and provision of interpreting services; workload related to educating the public about court activities and to providing technical support to family court and problem-solving court judges and staff; and maintenance of the courts system’s high speed network. The branch submitted these budget requests with recognition of a cautious economic outlook. (This link goes to more information about [current court funding and the budget request for the 2020 – 2021 fiscal year](#).)



## Judicial Management Council

Regarded as high-level management consultants to the supreme court, Florida's [Judicial Management Councils](#) (JMCs) have been offering guidance and recommendations to the judicial branch since 1953. The fifth iteration of the JMC was established in November 2012 as a "focused advisory body to assist the Chief Justice and this Court in identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and means to address them." This JMC was envisioned as becoming "part of a loop that will assist the Court with forward-looking vision, while the Court gets feedback from the trial and district courts, the chief judges, and the conferences." Before establishing a committee to address a significant new issue or concern that implicates branch policy, the supreme court considers referring it to the JMC (see [In Re: Implementation of Judicial Branch Governance Study Group Recommendations](#), pp. 10 – 11).



For their first meeting of the 2018 – 20 term, Judicial Management Council members met in Tallahassee; here, they are talking about judicial branch modernization.

The current JMC is a dexterous body designed to respond quickly and resourcefully to challenges facing the branch. This agility is achieved through the creation of workgroups that are charged with specific tasks and are dissolved once the tasks are completed.

The JMC is now in its fourth two-year term. Of the workgroups established in the council's earlier terms, five completed their tasks 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. The Long-Range Strategic Planning Workgroup revised the [Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch, 2016 – 2021](#); the court approved it, and implementation began in January 2016. The Trial Court Security Workgroup drafted a final report, which included 17 recommendations to promote safety and security in Florida's trial courts; implementation began after the report was approved by the court in September 2018. And the Guardianship Workgroup offered 25 recommendations to address guardianship and guardianship advocacy issues in its final report; the recommendations were submitted to the court in June 2018 for consideration and referral, where appropriate, to responsible stakeholders.

Below is information about two recently sunset workgroups (the Workgroup on County Court Jurisdiction and the Workgroup on Appellate Review of County Court Decisions) and three active workgroups (the Access Workgroup, the Workgroup on Remote Appearance, and the Workgroup on Court Costs and Fines).

### Workgroup on County Court Jurisdiction

The Workgroup on County Court Jurisdiction was established in August 2018 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 (see [AOSC18-39](#)).

In its final report to the supreme court, submitted in November 2018, the workgroup recommended raising the small claims jurisdictional limit and supported an increase in the county court jurisdictional limit. While small claims jurisdictional limits are governed by court rule, county court jurisdictional limits are governed by statute. In December 2018, the supreme court approved pursuing a jurisdictional increase of small claims from \$5,000 to \$8,000 as part of the recommendations from the workgroup. And in May 2019, the governor approved [House Bill 337](#), which, in part, increases the county court threshold to \$30,000 on January 1, 2020, and to \$50,000 on January 1, 2023. The bill also requires OSCA to submit a report to the legislature and governor by February 2021, making recommendations regarding the adjustment of county court jurisdiction. An implementation team is currently examining all possible impacts associated with the jurisdictional change, including impacts on facilities, staffing, case types, docket management, time standards, mediation, judicial education, justice stakeholders, access to courts, and information technology.



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

### Workgroup on Appellate Review of County Court Decisions

The Workgroup on Appellate Review of County Court Decisions was established in January 2019 to study whether circuit courts should be uniformly required to hear appeals from the county courts in panels and to determine whether other changes in the processes for the review of county court decisions would be desirable (see [AOSC19-3](#)).

Before the workgroup was established, the legal community and the business community had expressed concern about the lack of circuit *en banc* processes and about inconsistent publication of circuit court appellate decisions. In response, the Florida Bar Appellate Rules Committee had proposed several amendments that would have required circuit courts to hear appeals in panels of three judges, as is done in the district courts of appeal (DCAs). While the supreme court recognized that recommended changes would result in increased workload for the circuit courts and would especially burden less populous circuits, which have fewer judges, it found merit in the argument that appeals to the circuit court should be handled more uniformly across the state. Thus the court established the Workgroup on Appellate Review of County

**Court Decisions.** Following extensive deliberations, the workgroup ultimately considered two options: fix the circuit court appellate process, addressing specific challenges related to circuit court appellate practices; or transfer the circuit courts' appellate and related extraordinary writ authority to the DCAs. The workgroup's final report and recommendations are now being considered by the supreme court.

## Access Workgroup

Established in April 2014, the Access Workgroup has focused on facilitating access to justice for self-represented litigants through the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Florida project. DIY Florida enables self-represented litigants and others, through a series of interview questions, to rapidly assemble web-based pleadings and other documents suitable for filing.

The workgroup completed development of a landlord/tenant set of interviews and published those interviews live for public use on the E-Filing Portal in December 2018; as of June 2019, 80 filings had been submitted. The small claims interview is available on the test site; the workgroup is currently reviewing this interview in preparation for the test phase, which is expected to begin soon. An additional 22 interviews have been completed and are now available to be programmed by the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers. To buttress this initiative, lawmakers, during the 2019 legislative session, provided funding for two full-time positions—an attorney and an information systems analyst—that will focus full-time on implementing, supporting, and enhancing DIY Florida.

## Workgroup on Remote Appearance

The Workgroup on Remote Appearance was established in January 2019 to consider how the courts system might employ remote appearance technologies to enhance efficiencies and cost effectiveness for courts and court users (see [AOSC19-2](#)).

The workgroup is working to identify the types of court proceedings in which remote appearance technology may be used lawfully and effectively. Toward that end, workgroup members met with Cisco to discuss current remote technology trends and application in a courtroom environment. In addition to surveying Florida trial and appellate courts to assess current use of remote appearance technology, the workgroup reviewed court applications of remote appearance technology in other states. It will produce a final report by March 31, 2020.



Members of the Judicial Management Council gather at the Duval County Courthouse in the Fourth Circuit for their September 2019 meeting; here, Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA (on left), gives an update on the judicial branch long-range plan.

## Workgroup on Court Costs and Fines

Established in December 2018, the Workgroup on Court Costs and Fines is charged with reviewing court costs and fines in Florida as well as making recommendations, if warranted, for processes ensuring that the imposition of such assessments does not disproportionately impact low-income individuals (see [AOSC18-77](#)).

More than 110 different entities receive disbursements from these assessments, and disbursement practices vary across counties. So, to understand the processes in Florida for the collection and disbursement of court costs and fines, the workgroup began by meeting with several clerks and the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers. The workgroup is now researching the collateral impacts to low-income people who owe assessments and are facing driver license suspensions, liens, and collections, and it is also exploring options to expand the conversion of assessments to community service and to revise assessment collection practices. A final report is due from the workgroup on June 30, 2020.



## 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).



Judge Melanie May, Fourth DCA, chairs the Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability.

## Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability

Every two years via supreme court administrative order, the DCAP&A is re-established and directed to work on specific issues and projects (see the administrative order governing the DCAP&A's [2018 – 2020 term](#)). During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the commission, which is currently chaired by Judge Melanie G. May, Fourth DCA, has largely focused on developing an online mechanism for presenting district court caseload data to the public.

## Online Dashboard for Conveying Caseload Information

[Trial court statistics](#) and [supreme court caseload data](#) are readily available online. To provide a more complete and transparent picture of judicial branch performance, the DCAP&A has been working to make statistical information about Florida's DCAs available, as well. In collaboration with the Appellate Court Technology Committee, the commission identified and established performance indicators for display on an online dashboard, providing easy access to information about DCA caseloads, filings, and dispositions. As envisioned, the dashboard will be located on each DCA's website.

Since the approval of the performance indicators, the DCAP&A has been working with the Office of Information Technology, under the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA), to move this concept forward. Staff are currently working on implementation, and the project is expected to be completed by June 2020.



## Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability

Every two years via supreme court administrative order, the TCP&A is re-established and directed to work on particular issues and projects (see the administrative order governing the TCP&A's [2018 – 20 term](#)). The commission is currently chaired by Judge Diana Moreland, Twelfth Circuit, and, during the 2018 – 19 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 Uniform Case Reporting Project, and the Trial Court Data Quality Initiative.

### 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 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).



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

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 (TCBC). The workgroup is co-chaired by TCP&A chair Judge Moreland and TCBC member Judge John Stargel, Tenth Circuit.

The workgroup was first tasked with identifying funding and operational policy changes that could improve the provision of expert witness services. The supreme court approved workgroup recommendations to set uniform rates for services across the state and to limit the appointment of experts initially (see [AOSC18-17 Adoption Of Amended Expert Witness Rate Structure Chart For Court Appointed Expert Witness Services In Florida's Trial Courts](#)). These policies have been successful in containing the cost of appointing expert witnesses and, as a result, decreasing the amount of the contractual expenditures.

More recently, the workgroup turned its attention to court interpreting services, and this focus provided several opportunities for enhancement in the 2018 – 19 fiscal year. For instance, with the decrease in expert witness contractual expenditures, the workgroup recommended (and the TCBC



approved) that the savings be used to purchase Virtual Remote Interpreting (VRI) equipment (VRI enables circuits to access court interpreting resources remotely, thereby supporting their efforts to better meet their interpreting needs; see more about VRI below). The workgroup continues to evaluate the difficulties with recruiting and retaining certified court interpreters and is developing allocation criteria for positions held in the statewide reserve.

In addition, the workgroup has been involved in an effort to consider cost containment approaches for due process services and court-appointed counsel. During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the Justice Administrative Commission projected a significant budget deficit for paying attorney fees and other related costs in private, court-appointed counsel cases and indigent-for-costs cases—payments that are critical to due process for eligible individuals. During the 2019 legislative session last spring, lawmakers did provide funds to cover the deficit. But in response to lawmaker concern about the increasing expenditures, the workgroup began considering whether judges, attorneys, and the Justice Administrative Commission could implement cost containment measures; toward that end, the workgroup has been analyzing cost drivers and cost management solutions, which may culminate in policy recommendations.

### 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.

In 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: four circuits (the Seventh, Ninth, Fourteenth, and Sixteenth) began sharing remote interpreting resources, and OSCA housed the call manager appliance; the following year, two more circuits (the Third and the Fifteenth) joined the pilot. 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 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 and management issues associated with shared remote interpreting.

The committee also oversees the implementation of Virtual Remote Interpreting (VRI), a solution that allows the interpreter to provide services remotely through telepresence technology. While telephone interpreting is limited to providing consecutive interpreting (i.e., the interpreter must wait for the parties to finish



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.

speaking before communicating and providing an interpretation), VRI facilitates 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 physically present in the courtroom.

The implementation of VRI is divided into three phases. In Phase I, the interpreter provides remote interpreter coverage by making a call to the specific courtroom for pre-scheduled events; these events are point-to-point (two locations only), and calls (both audio and video portions) are routed through a call manager. Phase II includes the addition of multi-point functionality via a cloud-based bridge. In this scenario, 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 Phase III represents the transition to on-demand access to remote interpreters. In this scenario, the call to access an interpreter originates from the courtroom at the time the need is identified. Several circuits are using VRI in an on-demand model, while others employ the pre-scheduled model.

Since 2014, when the concept of sharing remote interpreting services was first being piloted, the use of VRI has expanded to 16 of Florida's 20 circuits, with some using the shared resource (inter-circuit) model and some implementing intra-circuit systems.

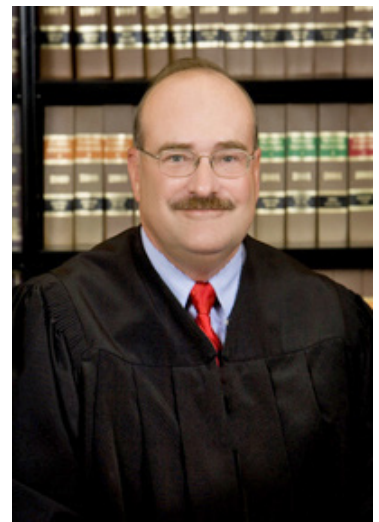
### The Uniform Case Reporting Project

The Uniform Case Reporting (UCR) Project is a data collection initiative 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 Alessandroni, Charlotte County, the UCR Project 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 and better measure and manage performance. 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, OSCA has been working with clerks of court to support their implementation of this dynamic data exchange framework. UCR Project data submission falls into two phases: Phase I is the data transmission phase; Phase II is the data verification phase. As of October 2019, 53 counties had completed Phase I (see [AOSC18-18](#) for the implementation schedule). Clerks of court, circuit court administration, and OSCA continue working together to verify and enhance the quality of the case activity data being exchanged. These quality



The Uniform Case Reporting Project is overseen by the TCP&A's Court Statistics and Workload Committee, which is chaired by Judge Paul Alessandroni, Charlotte County.

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. (This link goes to a detailed discussion of the [UCR Project](#) and a summary of the current reporting status.)

### Trial Court Data Quality Initiative

Since 2014, the TCP&A has been involved in developing and implementing a performance management framework to improve the trial courts' capacity for measuring their performance and applying the results to make procedural refinements. In 2016, the commission's Performance Management Workgroup released [Foundations for a Performance Management Framework](#), which describes the framework's goal and scope, its essential element principles and administrative principles, and its long-term objectives. And in 2018, the workgroup submitted [Recommendations to Improve Performance Management in Florida's Trial Courts](#), which offers suggestions for advancing the statewide collection and use of performance measurement data; the recommendations were adopted by the supreme court in October 2018.



Judge Jennifer Bailey, Eleventh Circuit, chairs the TCP&A's Data Quality Workgroup.

Recognizing that quality data are necessary for measuring court performance and for directing resources where performance is not meeting desired goals, the court, in keeping with workgroup recommendations, directed the TCP&A to establish a Data Quality Workgroup to address the accuracy of, and thereby improve confidence in, trial court data; the workgroup was enjoined to focus its work on the data elements associated with the UCR Project (see above). Even though the project is not yet fully functional, focusing these efforts on it now should help to improve confidence in UCR Project once it becomes the primary source for many types of trial court data.

The Data Quality Workgroup, which is chaired by Judge Jennifer Bailey, Eleventh Circuit and which held its first meeting in March 2019, began addressing its charge by seeking to identify what actions take place at the local level that prevent proper case closure and uniform application of case status docket codes. The central challenge facing the workgroup is the lack of available data relating to case events and case status. These data will eventually be available through the UCR Project but, in the interim, the workgroup is focused on improving the overall confidence in court data by identifying case closing events in the first iteration of the case; looking at why cases are not being closed when a data correction is involved; reviewing what defines open, closed, inactive, and reopened case statuses; obtaining input from the various divisions of court and from the technologists both on court and clerk sides to better define data fields and data entry processes to reduce error, possibly with the assistance of technology; and looking at ways automation and case triage may help reduce data quality problems. The workgroup will complete its charge and submit a report to the court by June 30, 2020.



### Fairness and Diversity Awareness

Florida's judicial branch strives to embody the principles of 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 mindfully to create court settings that are free of preconceptions and to shape environments in which judges, court personnel, attorneys, and litigants treat each other with courtesy, dignity, and consideration. (Take this link to read more about the [history of fairness and diversity initiatives](#) in Florida’s judicial branch.)



As co-chair of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity, Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit (seated, second from left), assembled subject matter experts from throughout the state to present a “Your Fair Courts Training” for newly elected judges and other judicial staff as her last contribution of service to the judicial branch before retiring.

For the last 15 years, the courts system’s fairness initiatives have been guided by the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity, established by the supreme court 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 an office of equal opportunity—continued to explore funding opportunities for fairness and diversity education programs; built on its outreach efforts to advance fairness and diversity initiatives in the Florida justice system; expanded its diversity education campaign for judges and court staff; and hosted the thirty-first annual conference of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts (this link goes to the [administrative order governing the 2018 - 20 term](#)).

Among its many projects, the committee continued efforts to coordinate and collaborate with The Florida Bar, local bar associations, community organizations, Florida law schools, and other partners to offer diversity trainings and to advance fairness and diversity initiatives in the Florida justice system. For instance, the Tenth Circuit conducted its Fourth Annual Fairness and Diversity Summit and also hosted a Diversity and Inclusion Networking Social for Legal Career-Seekers; with the Tampa Hispanic Bar Association, committee members

participated in a Tampa Bay Voluntary Bar Leaders Summit; and the committee coordinated with Ave Maria School of Law and the Florida State University College of Law to conduct implicit bias training for faculty and law school students.

The Committee also developed a training series called Your Fair Courts Toolbox: Developing Skills for Better Courts. These trainings, which are designed to provide judges and court staff with the most up-to-date information, are customized to meet the needs of individual courts. They address topics such as implicit bias, sentencing bias, handling cases involving self-represent litigants, juvenile justice, sexual harassment, and access to justice. During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, Toolbox Trainings were conducted in the Fifth, Tenth, and Thirteenth circuits.

Perhaps the committee's most singular achievement was its facilitation of 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. The conference planning committee was chaired by Judge Scott Bernstein, Eleventh Circuit, a long-time member of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity (and former chair), who also serves on the board of the National Consortium. In addition to selecting speakers and panelists, committee members spearheaded a campaign to create 15 scholarships for Florida judges to attend this two-day program in Miami. The honor of presenting the



Eleventh Circuit Judge Scott Bernstein, executive board member of the National Consortium on Race and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts (on right), and Judge Susan Maven, president of the board, welcome *Devil in The Grove* author Gilbert King, the opening speaker of the 2019 NCREFC conference in Miami.



More than 40 judges from north and central Florida attended the Fifth Circuit's diversity training on To Be Fair – Addressing Bias in the Justice System, held in the Villages in October 2019. Pictured here are the event speakers.

closing plenary—titled The Continuing Challenges of Criminal Justice Reform: Addressing Implicit Bias in the Twenty-First Century—was given to three Florida judges: Justice Alan Lawson; Chief Judge Charles E. Williams, Twelfth Circuit; and Judge David Denkin, Sarasota County. Altogether, 140 justice system professionals from more than 40 states came together to share tools, techniques, and improvement processes with one another.

## 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 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 engaged in 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.

### Long-Range Issue #2 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, chaired by Justice Labarga, has embarked upon a coordinated effort to identify and address the unmet civil legal needs of these populations. Among its accomplishments during the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the commission launched the new Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice website, broadened its focus to include issues especially faced by veterans, produced an explanatory video to help self-represented litigants equip themselves for their day in court, updated the Florida Courts Help website, and, with a recently awarded federal grant, began to reimagine how to further promote meaningful access to justice for all by working more effectively across organizational boundaries and by better assisting self-represented litigants.

Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) staff, under the direction of the Access Commission, launched the new and improved [Commission on Access to Civil Justice website](#), featuring additional resources, a more navigable site design, and a fresh, clean, contemporary look. The site is now responsive, as well, meaning that visitors can easily view it on any device—computer, tablet, or phone.

The commission also expanded its focus to address access to civil justice issues faced specifically by veterans. At a December 2018 commission meeting, members of the Tallahassee Veterans Legal Collaborative (TVLC) were invited to share information about a successful program they had initiated: in less

than two years, TVLC grew from a small group of volunteers to a full-service veterans legal clinic; more than 700 veterans, from Tallahassee and throughout the state, have sought services from this clinic. In response to the commission’s request to document their work, Professor Jennifer LaVia, director of the Veterans Legal Clinic at Florida State University College of Law, and Mr. Dan Hendrickson, president of the TVLC, developed a guide called [How to Start a Veterans Legal Clinic: Lessons Learned by the Tallahassee Veterans Legal Collaborative](#), available on the commission website. To further promote access to civil justice, the commission hopes to expand innovations like these to other areas of the state.

In addition, the commission released its first video, [Preparing for Your Day in Civil Court](#). Just over four minutes long, this video, which was developed for viewers who have never appeared in court before, offers important tips and points to helpful resources. This is the first video in what commission members envision as a library of video resources to help self-represented litigants. Future videos will focus on what litigants can expect in court and whom they will see in court (e.g., the judges and other justice system employees) and the roles of each; another video will present information about typical court processes. Developed by members of the Young Lawyers Division of The Florida Bar and OSCA staff, the video responds to a recommendation in the commission’s long-range plan to develop explanatory video content for self-represented litigants. The video was widely distributed to court partners and is also available on the commission’s website and through the Florida Courts Help website and app.

Also under the leadership of the commission, OSCA staff, having recently updated the [Florida Courts Help website](#), are now working on version 2.0 of the [Florida Courts Help App](#). The app—which was downloaded more than 4,000 times between its December 2017 release and October 2019—is a direct, mobile-friendly pathway to Florida Courts Help, a repository of Florida’s most requested court information and forms, including 186 supreme court-approved, fillable family law forms; links and contact information for self-help



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*)





centers across the state; plain language instructions and descriptions of first steps and next actions; and contact information for free and low-cost legal services, lawyer referral services, and various kinds of legal help from multiple online resources. During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, OSCA staff refreshed the website content and design, adding a new Resources for Veterans page, a locus for helpful videos, a More Help menu (FAQs, Preparing for Court, Finding Help at the Courthouse, etc.), and a Feedback button (“How can we improve this service?”).

Finally, the Access Commission, through The Florida Bar (which also provides staff assistance to the commission), was awarded \$30,000 in grant funding by the national Justice for All Initiative, which supports state efforts to include all civil justice community stakeholders in a partnership that works to better understand, adopt, and move toward meaningful access to justice for all. The grant is subsidizing commission work on two commission objectives: to conduct outreach to non-traditional access to civil justice stakeholders with the goal of enhancing access and promoting a “no wrong door” approach; and to develop a process to directly engage self-represented litigants and determine court procedures, policies, forms, and communications in need of improvement, allowing for a positive user experience with the court system while preserving substantive and procedural fairness and due process rights. The Florida Bar contracted with a nationally recognized consultant to assist with Justice for All research and outreach efforts. Through 2019, the consultant arranged focus groups, conducted self-represented litigant interviews, and engaged non-traditional stakeholders to better understand challenges faced by self-represented litigants. A comprehensive report, which is due from the consultant in January 2020, will help supplement the commission’s dynamic strategic plan and identify additional ways to promote meaningful access to justice.



## Court Interpreting Services

Due to its geographic location, Florida has more residents with limited English proficiency than most other states (Florida has the fourth largest population in the US of people with limited English proficiency). And this population is increasing. Foreign-born citizens make up more than 20 percent of state denizens, and, based on an estimate from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), more than 28 percent of Floridians older than age five speak a language other than English at home—with 41.3 percent of them saying they “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 were 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; thus, among its goals, the plan underlines



The Annual Education Program of the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida hosted a training on Doing Justice with Court Interpreting; presenters included (standing, l – r) Judge J. Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit; Judge James R. McCune, Marion County; (seated, l – r) Ms Lisa Bell, OSCA; and Mr. Agustin de la Mora, a federally certified court interpreter.

the need to “reduce communication and language barriers to facilitate participation in court proceedings” (goal 2.5 of the [long-range plan](#)).

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, and to expand the reach of, court interpreting services (to read about Virtual Remote Interpreting, a technology-based solution to help courts provide interpreting services, see the article on [Performance and Accountability](#) above). Spoken language interpreters participate in several hundred thousand court events in Florida each year. These trained and regulated professionals support branch efforts to meet three primary objectives: they place those who use court interpreting services on an equal footing with those who do not require these services; they protect due process rights and fundamental interests; and they ensure that Florida’s courts comply with state law and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and other federal laws. To register, designate, regulate, and discipline court interpreters (as set forth in the [Florida Rules for Certification and Regulation of Spoken Language Court Interpreters](#)), the supreme court established the Court Interpreter Certification Board in 2006; the board is currently chaired by Judge J. Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit.

The board has embarked on a series of initiatives that demonstrate the courts system’s commitment to removing real and perceived language access barriers to justice. Among these efforts, the board is working to ensure that judges have opportunities for advanced levels of education and development related to language access, thereby enabling them to effectively meet



Mr. Todd Tuzzolino, chief deputy trial court administrator for the Fifth Circuit, welcomes everyone to the statewide Court Interpreter Conference.

the needs of those they serve. Inspired by this goal, in 2019, board member Judge James R. McCune, Jr., Marion County, spearheaded a two-and-a-half-hour training on “Doing Justice with Court Interpreting” for the Annual Education Program of the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida. The interactive training, which was conducted by Judge Abdoney, Mr. Agustin de la Mora (a federally certified court interpreter), and Ms Lisa Bell (an OSCA senior court operations consultant who oversees the statewide court interpreting program), focused on what it takes to be a court interpreter; the interpreter’s roles and duties; the ethical obligations of the judge, lawyer, and interpreter during a court event; court interpreter needs as well as judicial expectations—and how best to work as justice partners; and the impact of cultural differences on how justice is perceived and dispensed. Altogether, more than 260 judges participated. Describing the goal of the training, Judge McCune said, “This program was first and foremost about ‘Doing Justice’ in the purest sense,

with an understanding of the applicable rules and procedures, roles and duties, and needs and expectations but also with an appreciation for cultural differences on how justice is perceived and dispensed. A key take-away was the need for judges and court interpreters to serve as ‘justice partners’ while ‘doing justice’ together in our Florida courtrooms.”

To ensure they maintain high standards of professionalism and ethical behavior, court interpreters, like judges, also must have opportunities for timely education and trainings on language access-related issues. So, in addition to facilitating education programs for judges, the board approves training programs for court interpreters, who are required to complete at least 16 hours of continuing interpreter education every two years.



More than 200 court interpreters, prospective court interpreters, and American Sign Language interpreters from across the state participated in the Fifth Circuit’s two-day court interpreting conference.

While many of the approved trainings are provided by private entities, increasingly, individual circuits are developing their own free, face-to-face training opportunities with the help of local judges, staff interpreters, attorneys, professors, and other topic experts. Thus far, nine circuits (the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth) have received board approval for a wealth of [continuing interpreter education programs](#).

The target audience for most of these programs has been local court interpreters, but some circuits have begun expanding that reach. For example, the Tenth Circuit—which has facilitated three, free, day-long programs in the last three years—invites court interpreters from across the state to attend; each program has drawn approximately 100 participants from far and wide. And in May 2019, the Fifth Circuit coordinated Florida’s first ever, two-day statewide court interpreter conference. Altogether, more than 200 court interpreters, prospective court interpreters, and American Sign Language interpreters from nearly every circuit in Florida came together for this free training. It was so well-received that other circuits have expressed interest in keeping the momentum going; the goal is to make it an annual event.

One of the many factors that contributed to the success of this program was that the Fifth Circuit’s chief deputy trial court administrator, Mr. Todd Tuzzolino, had been doing outreach to the University of Central Florida, the University of South Florida, and the University of Florida to talk to students in various foreign language-related classes about opportunities in the court interpreting field. Many circuits have been facing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified court interpreters, and while Mr. Tuzzolino’s primary goal is to generate student interest in a career in court interpreting, he has also developed some helpful university connections. These connections proved invaluable when he was searching for faculty for the conference.

Inspired by the Fifth Circuit’s successful university outreach, other circuits have been actively trying to connect with language-gifted university students who may be looking for an unusual, exciting career path.

The Thirteenth Circuit, for instance, recently launched a similar endeavor. In the last few months, Ms Maritza Lopez, the circuit's court interpreter manager, has reached out to students and faculty at the University of Tampa, Universidad Ana G. Mendez (a dual language university), Hillsborough Community College, the University of South Florida, and the University of Central Florida (for this visit, Thirteenth Circuit staff were joined by staff from the Fifth Circuit). Through efforts like these, Florida's courts are doing what they can to ensure that every voice is heard in the courtroom.



### Guardianship

A magnet for retirees since the 1960s, Florida, 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. In fact, 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 2018 – 19, guardianship filings have increased 21.14 percent. (Note: while older Floridians constitute the majority of guardianship cases, 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.)



Chief Judge Frederick Lauten, Ninth Circuit, who chaired the Florida Wings stakeholder group, welcomes stakeholders to the fourth WINGS summit.

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 was the supreme court's Guardianship Workgroup, established under the Judicial Management Council in 2016 to address this seeming trend and its ramifications for the courts. The workgroup examined judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianship to ensure that courts are best protecting the person, property, and rights of people who have been judged to be incapacitated and people who may have diminished capacity to function independently. The workgroup's final report—which included 25 recommendations for consideration and referral, where appropriate, to the responsible stakeholders—was submitted to the supreme court in 2018.

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, Florida's courts established a Working Interdisciplinary

Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) in this state. Since the launch of WINGS in July 2017, Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) staff and approximately 50 WINGS stakeholders from across the state have been working together to identify, assess, and improve guardianship practices and other decision-making alternatives, with the goal of enhancing the quality of care and the 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.



Judge Susan Morley, Fifth Circuit, who chaired the committee that addressed low physician participation in examining committees, gives her presentation on the group's findings to WINGS members at the May 2019 summit.

After developing a strategic plan of priorities for guardianship reform in Florida, WINGS stakeholders began working on—and completed—their top three priority projects. They drafted a comprehensive plan, including recommendations and recruitment strategies, for boosting the number of physicians serving on examining committees; created an [informational guide and toolkit](#) for contemplating decision-making options; and developed a tool to assist law enforcement officers and first responders in identifying and reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation. In addition, in partnership with Stetson University's Center for Excellence in Elder Law, the National Judicial College (national experts in judicial training), and judges and attorneys from across the state, WINGS produced four e-learning modules on a range of guardianship issues. These web-based, interactive courses, available on the [WINGS website](#), are designed to increase judges' and attorneys' professional competence and skills related to guardianship and less restrictive options. WINGS members continue to press on with their collaborative endeavors. They recently began working on three new priority projects: to develop and pilot a volunteer court visitor program; to establish a process for courts to notify the Social Security Administration when a guardian of the property who is also a representative payee is removed; and, in an effort to improve the consistency, quality, and content of family guardianship training courses, to design an evaluation guide for courts to use when approving these courses.

Following the successful completion of the grant, OSCA, seeking ways to sustain the momentum of the WINGS collaboration, reached out to Stetson University, which embraced the opportunity to assume the administrative responsibilities for facilitating WINGS. Stetson is the ideal locus for this transfer, for it houses the renowned Center for Excellence in Elder Law, whose faculty, national experts in this field, provide legal education to law students, attorneys, and judges on elder and special needs law and produce scholarly research on issues affecting those who are older and/or have special needs. In addition, the WINGS initiative will provide Stetson's College of Law students with a unique opportunity to get hands-on experience in this rare and growing niche area in the law.



## Family Court

Some of the most complex, distressing, and private family matters end up being decided in the courts—matters like separation and divorce, child support, termination of parental rights, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, family violence, child neglect and abuse, substance abuse, and mental illness. 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 proposed 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 assistance to the courts is the Dependency Court Improvement Panel, which works in conjunction with the committee. Another important family court 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 dependency 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 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.



Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, chairs the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court.

## 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 (view the administrative order governing the [2018 – 20 term of the FCC](#)). The FCC is currently chaired by Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, and comprises judges, court administrators, and justice system partners.

For its most ambitious project during the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the FCC began to develop a Handling Family Cases course curriculum, including a Family Case Refresher course, using a blended learning approach; this curriculum is on track to be released in summer 2020.

In addition, the committee facilitated the 2018 Family Court Workshop. More than 80 judges, magistrates, and court staff participated in this day-long event, during which teams from each judicial circuit received training about [trauma-responsive court strategies](#) and the [one family, one judge model](#) (i.e., all cases involving one family are brought before one judge, unless impractical). The morning session focused on court practices that can help protect children from the effects of toxic stress. And in one of the afternoon sessions, each circuit team completed an evaluation tool to assess the degree to which each of its counties is implementing the one family, one judge model. The evaluation tool measured three family court dimensions: the degree to which each county identifies related cases; the degree to which each county coordinates related cases; and the number of judicial officers involved with a family that has multiple cases. This activity gave circuit teams an opportunity to reflect on their level of implementation and helped them develop a baseline against which to measure their progress.

### Dependency Court Improvement Panel

Established in 2009 by then Chief Justice Peggy Quince, the multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel, currently chaired by Judge Hope Bristol, Seventeenth Circuit, addresses ways to improve practices and decision-making specifically in dependency cases. During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the panel focused on enhancing the Early Childhood Court Initiative and family dependency drug court, both of which are managed by Office of Court Improvement (OCI) staff.

[Early Childhood Court](#) (ECC) encompasses child welfare cases involving children under the age of three. Like other [problem-solving courts](#), ECC 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 for promoting long-term stability for litigants). Offering evidence-based treatment, judicial supervision, and accountability, ECC 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. Jurisdictions throughout Florida have been using this approach since 2015, and since then, Florida's ECCs have grown from three sites to 23 sites; the implementation of new sites is ongoing.

During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the OCI provided training and technical assistance to new and existing ECC sites. The premier training event was a three-day all-sites meeting: 180 members of Florida's ECC teams—including judges, court staff, child welfare leadership, social workers, attorneys, community coordinators, and service providers—gathered to share best practices and to design strategies to support the standardization and the sustainability of the ECC approach. Sessions focused on topics like infant mental health, co-parenting, data measurement, the value of teaming, and site self-assessments for continuous quality improvement and growth.



Chair of the Dependency Court Improvement Panel, Judge Hope Bristol, Seventeenth Circuit, welcomes new panel members at the May 2019 meeting.



Dependency Court Improvement Panel members exchange thoughts after hearing a Seminole Tribal Court update.

The OCI also oversaw two important ECC evaluations. First, as part of a grant award, Florida's Institute for Child Welfare conducted a one-year, statewide evaluation of Florida's ECCs. The evaluation offered a better understanding of the level of implementation, characteristics of participating sites, outcomes of participating children and families, and cost effectiveness. Based on these findings, the institute provided recommendations regarding the ECCs' sustainability

and their fidelity to the ECC approach (see the Executive Summary of the [2018 – 2019 Early Childhood Court Evaluation](#)). The second was an internal evaluation: after compiling ECC data, the OCI developed findings regarding the permanency and safety of ECC children ages 0 – 3 (at time of removal) compared with a random sample of non-ECC children over a five-year period. In addition to showing positive results, the analysis led to recommendations for improving the continuous quality improvement process (see the [2018 Early Childhood Court Comparative Analysis](#)).

In addition to its focus on the ECC, the Dependency Court Improvement Panel has been working to strengthen and standardize Florida's [family dependency drug courts](#) (FDDC). This problem-solving docket, which bridges the gap between adult drug court and traditional dependency court, offers intensive services to families in which at least one custodial parent has a substance use disorder and at least one child is in out-of-home care or in danger of being placed there. FDDC uses a holistic approach to treat the entire family: while receiving substance use disorder treatment, parents also receive services that can assist them in providing a safe home for their children (e.g., parenting classes, parent-child relationship counseling, housing, transportation, etc.); the child may also receive developmental assessments and services as needed. First established in 1999, Florida's FDDCs have increased to 13 sites.



During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, OSCA, thanks to funding to hire a statewide liaison for the FDDCs, significantly amplified training for and technical assistance to the FDDCs. The liaison conducted a needs assessment of all 13 sites, established quarterly collaboration and networking phone calls to support FDDC program coordinators and managers, hosted two learning webinars, conducted a half-day in-person training at one of the FDDC sites, and submitted a federal grant application for funding to enhance/implement evidence-based programs that have been shown to attain the best possible outcomes in FDDCs.

In addition, since July 2019, when the National Association of Drug Court Professionals released the first ever best practice standards for family treatment court, OCI staff have been working with the Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts to create FDDC standards for Florida (anticipated completion of the draft is December 2019).

### Office of Court Improvement

The [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. During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, in addition to providing assistance to the FCC and the Dependency Court Improvement Panel, the OCI continued to develop resources to support judges and court personnel who handle cases involving domestic violence issues, delinquency issues, and opioid use disorder.



For [domestic violence](#), OCI staff facilitated two regional trainings and two webinars for judicial officers who handle any aspect of civil domestic violence injunctions; OCI also updated the *Domestic Violence Virtual Court* (an interactive training program) and posted several new e-training modules for judges and stakeholders. In addition, OCI staff prepared and distributed caselaw updates each month, tracked legislation, and provided

scholarships for judges to attend statewide and national trainings. OCI staff also worked with the Domestic Violence Advisory Group to develop [Florida Judicial Promising Practices Guide for Domestic Violence Injunction Cases](#), June 2019. Designed to improve judicial decision-making and help judges ensure an effective judicial process, this guide assists Florida judges with court and circuit procedures and courtroom security and also offers several promising practices to assist with hearings, training, and working as a team with court administration.

And for [delinquency](#), OCI staff created, facilitated, and staffed four regional judicial training programs; created four training videos (available online), featuring judges and key Department of Juvenile Justice personnel; produced and distributed monthly summaries of juvenile law cases; updated the *Delinquency Benchbook* and included revised benchcards; started an online delinquency information-sharing group for judges (Yammer), regularly providing content for the group; conducted court observations to ensure that OCI programs are meeting the needs of the judiciary and court staff; and, as the judicial branch representative, worked with the Statewide Juvenile Delinquency Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Collaborative Team to expand JDAI practices to more circuits in Florida.

Finally, OCI staff are overseeing the Florida State Courts Opioid Initiative, a branch response to the state's opioid crisis that involves both statewide and circuit-specific efforts. Supported by a two-year federal grant, this initiative, which launched in February 2019, focuses on awareness of and on effective ways to address opioid use disorder in problem-solving and family courts. For this project, co-led by Judge Hope Bristol, Seventeenth Circuit, and Judge Steve Leifman, Miami-Dade County, circuit teams of judges and court staff (called "circuit champions") are developing, and sharing with their circuits, specialized knowledge regarding opioids and medication-assisted treatment (the courts now have 71 circuit champions—at least one in each circuit). With the grant funds, the OCI hired a court operations consultant to enhance the OCI's data systems, conduct needs assessments, develop resources, and provide training and technical assistance for judges, magistrates, and court staff throughout the state.

Because many individuals with opioid use disorder have court involvement, at some point, the court system has a front-line view of the opioid crisis. By collaborating with justice system partners and community organizations to deliver appropriate services, the courts are well-positioned to help address this public health crisis. The branch is supporting this effort by expanding the education of judges and court staff to recognize and understand emerging topics, such as treatment of opioid use disorder. (This link goes to information on the courts system's [Opioid Initiative](#), including infographics on opioids, opioid use disorder, and medication-assisted treatment.)



## Problem-Solving Courts

Problem-solving courts—a concept that includes court types like drug court, veterans court, and mental health 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.



Judge Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade County, chairs the Steering Committee on Problem-Solving Courts.

The first problem-solving court was established in 1989, when then Judge Herbert Klein, Miami-Dade County, launched the nation's, and the world's, first drug court. Since then, other kinds of problem-solving dockets have been implemented using the drug court model. The most prevalent problem-solving dockets in Florida are drug court, mental health court, veterans court, and early childhood court (for more on early childhood court and family dependency drug court, see the [Family Court article](#) above). Currently, Florida has 92 drug courts (49 adult felony, six adult misdemeanor, 20 juvenile, 13 family dependency, and four DUI courts); 31 mental health courts; 31 veterans courts; and 23 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 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 committee is continuing and expanding upon the work of the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts. Since this governance committee was established, it has been working to develop problem-solving court standards and to establish a problem-solving court certification program to ensure that these courts are operating effectively and with fidelity to the standards scientifically shown to produce better outcomes.

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 committee has been working to develop best practice standards for other problem-solving courts, specifically veterans court, family dependency drug court, and mental health court. Early childhood court best practice standards were recently approved by the supreme court.

And, second, the committee has been working to finalize the problem-solving court certification program, including developing any necessary protocols, forms, and tools and also determining the resources needed to implement the 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. The certification program and the best practice standards for family dependency drug court, mental health court, and veterans court are on target for completion by the end of the committee's two-year term, June 30, 2020.

In addition, as last year's annual report detailed, the judicial branch has been addressing a significant change in the ways problem-solving courts are funded—a change that gives the branch more discretion with the allocation of state dollars. In the past, the legislature appropriated the funding for problem-solving courts individually. However, starting in fiscal year 2018 – 19, lawmakers rolled all existing, recurring appropriations into one appropriation (\$8.9 million for FY 2018 – 19); to this, they added further funding, both recurring (\$2.5 million) and non-recurring dollars. The supreme court's Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC) was directed 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 Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts, and the Steering Committee on Children and Families in the Court. After allotting 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 also determined the conditions that problem-solving courts will need to meet to receive funding (i.e., report client-level data, comply with performance benchmarks, and comply with best practice standards and certification). These were approved by the TCBC in February 2019, and in fiscal year 2019 – 20 (for which lawmakers appropriated approximately \$11.3 million for problem-solving courts), the branch began phasing in the new requirements.



### Alternative Dispute Resolution

For more than 40 years, Florida’s courts have been promoting mediation and other alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes, which provide litigants with the opportunity to resolve their conflicts without judicial intervention. The first Florida citizen dispute settlement center was established in 1975, in Dade County. Soon after, the state’s first county court mediation program was founded 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 Florida State University College of Law Dean Talbot “Sandy” D’Alemberte established the Florida Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) in the mid-1980s. The DRC also certifies mediators and mediation training programs in five areas (county, family, circuit, dependency, and appellate); oversees



After an Advanced Family Mediation Training class in Inverness in November 2019, Fifth Circuit mediators gather for a group photo.

the grievance procedure against mediators and parenting coordinators; sponsors an annual conference for mediators and arbitrators and provides basic and advanced mediation training; and publishes a newsletter, [\*The Neutral\*](#), and an annual [\*ADR Resource Handbook\*](#).

In addition, 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); the Parenting Coordinator Review Board (which hears grievances involving qualified and court-appointed parenting coordinators); and 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). The DRC is also responsible for overseeing the [discipline of certified and court-appointed mediators and of qualified and court-appointed parenting coordinators](#)



The Mediator Ethics Advisory Committee offers written ethics advisory opinions based on questions from certified and court-appointed mediators; here, during a lunch break at the Annual Dispute Resolution Conference in August 2019, committee members meet to conduct business.

Currently, more than 5,600 mediators support judicial branch efforts to serve the citizens of Florida by making justice accessible for all. 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). To help mediators satisfy this requirement, the DRC sponsors an annual, statewide conference that offers two days of education in the areas of mediation, arbitration, and other ADR processes. ADR professionals from across the state attend this program to sharpen their skills, earn continuing mediator education credits, and network with their colleagues; indeed, nearly 1,000 conflict resolution practitioners attended the DRC's twenty-seventh annual conference in August 2019. Each year, between live attendance and recorded sessions, more than 100 hours of learning are available, making this conference the premier education event for mediators.

In addition, each year, DRC staff conduct three, free, 20-hour certified county mediation training programs for small claims mediators, most of whom volunteer for the trial court mediation programs. And DRC staff also conduct between six and eight free, advanced mediator ethics and professionalism programs for certified

mediators working in court-connected mediation programs. Even some of the state's youngest peacemakers are able to take advantage of DRC staff training: each year, in collaboration with local schools, the DRC hosts an educational Mediation Week event at the supreme court. Through offering these education programs and trainings, the DRC works 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 2018 – 19, approximately 250 mediators from across Florida reaped the benefits of trainings conducted by DRC staff.



Each year, Dispute Resolution Center staff conduct between six and eight advanced mediator ethics and professional programs for certified mediators working in court-connected mediation programs; pictured here are members of the Miami-Dade County class, who attended a June 2019 training.

During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, perhaps the most cutting-edge ADR-related initiative was the judicial branch's preparation for launching an online dispute resolution (ODR) pilot in six counties. The pilot project—under the direction of a joint workgroup of the Committee on ADR Rules and Policy and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability—includes three case types: small claims, civil traffic infractions, and dissolution of marriage when no children are involved. ODR involves litigants and, in some instances, court personnel in resolving disputes using a web-based platform designed to lead participants through a series of steps toward the goal of case resolution. The steps include posing standardized questions, providing an opportunity for response, allowing parties to make and accept case negotiation offers with or without the assistance of a third party neutral, and, in some instances, automatic generation of a settlement agreement. Initial reports indicate that ODR increases access to the courts for selected case types, and its use is expanding rapidly across state courts; this new way to resolve cases holds out the promise of preserving the time and resources both of litigants and the courts.

Finally, to those in the ADR field, the 2018 – 19 fiscal year brought several important legislative changes, including one that authorizes nationwide criminal background checks for applicants for mediator (and court interpreter) certification and one that enhances provisions governing the regulation of parenting coordinators. First, recent legislation now enables the DRC to require applicants for initial mediator certification to undergo a Level II screening (which involves both state and national databases). Mediators are required to be of good moral character (see rule 10.110, [Florida Rules for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediators](#)); however, prior to this legislation, the DRC lacked specific statutory authority to use Level II screening. And, second, new legislation adds exceptions to parenting coordination confidentiality that mirror those for mediation confidentiality (exceptions are for testimony or evidence offered to report, prove, or disprove a violation of professional malpractice or misconduct occurring during the parenting coordination process solely for the professional malpractice or the internal use of the body conducting the investigation of the

professional misconduct). This legislation also provides that investigators, prosecutors, and members of the Parenting Coordinator Review Board are not liable for civil damages “for any act or omission arising from the performance of his or her duties while acting within the scope of his or her appointed function or job description unless such person acted in bad faith or with malicious purpose.” Finally, the law provides the supreme court with authority over the training, ethical conduct, and discipline of parenting coordinators. These legislative changes support judicial branch efforts to attract, hire, and retain a qualified, ethical and diverse workforce.

## 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 cannot be taken for granted. That trust must be earned. 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 the state offer education and outreach events and activities for “students” of all ages, providing Floridians 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 both to their internal audiences—judges and court personnel—and to their external audiences—the public; court users; judicial branch partners and stakeholders; government entities; education, business, and civic organizations; and the media.

### Long-Range Issue #3 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 simultaneously considered strategies for advancing the communication-related goals that the plan was preparing to announce. Shaped in response to 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 enhance relationships with a variety of partners, strengthen 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, and then Chief Justice Jorge Labarga charged the branch's designated public information officers (PIOs) with putting the plan into effect in their respective courts, designing methods and activities that best respond to local needs and resources. Representing the 20 judicial circuits, the five district courts of appeal, the Florida Supreme Court, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator, the court PIOs are members of a statewide nonprofit professional association, the [Florida Court Public Information Officers](#) (FCPIO). To advance the communications goals outlined in the plan, they hold monthly conference calls; they also meet annually for an education program to address, among other timely topics, ideas for implementing the plan.



For year three of the communication plan implementation, the court PIOs focused largely on community outreach efforts to educate the public about the roles courts play in society. Across the state, Florida's courts made improvements to their local community outreach programs, increasing their number of court tours, education programs for adults, and innovative technology-based and web-based opportunities to engage the public. Among the more prevalent outreach efforts were tours for student groups and/or adults; visits to schools or classrooms by judges; speaker's bureaus; evening learning programs for the public; vodcast or video production; and Twitter town hall events.

Also during year three, courts increased their use of social media to promote justice system-related topics and events, both state-level and national. Law Day/Week, Adoption Day, and Take Your Child to Work Day were among the most popular events highlighted by Florida's courts; not far behind were Constitution Day, Veteran's Day, Juror Appreciation Day, and National Judicial Outreach Week. According to the [Year Three Implementation Report](#), produced by the Florida Supreme Court's Office of Public Information, "Using social media to promote or recognize such events provides an opportunity for courts to engage the public on a larger scale. The impact of such promotions is far reaching because courts can affect hundreds to thousands of people beyond their local courthouse using social media platforms."

The implementation report recognizes that court PIOs have made demonstrable progress in advancing communication plan goals and are optimistic about the benefits of these efforts. However, it also notes that, because most courts divide PIO duties among staff, resources are limited for handling media and public relations, education and outreach, and the creation of publication and social media content. Thus communication challenges persist: among the most predominant are lack of staffing and other resources, competing priorities, and finding time for PIO duties.

In addition to encouraging community outreach endeavors, the communication plan also recommends that PIOs "provide training and guidance on media relations and public speaking to judges and court employees who interact with the media and public on behalf of the courts" (Goal 1.6). Toward that end, during the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, six court PIOs conducted a course called The Judiciary and the Media in the Twenty-First Century to 30 judges attending the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies. Presenters shared valuable techniques for responding to the needs of the news media and for presenting the judicial branch in a positive light, also facilitating discussions on social media and the law, strategies for high-profile cases, and best practices for communications and outreach from around the state.

Because Florida is said to be leading the nation now in coordinated statewide communications planning, Florida PIOs are being invited to give presentations at national conferences about topics like the media and public relations, community outreach, education programs, social media, court publications, internal

communications, and court events. During the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, Mr. Craig Waters, director of the Florida Supreme Court’s Office of Public Information, was a presenter for a National Association for Court Management Annual Conference session on Crisis to Communities: The Role of Court Communication. And Ms Tricia Knox, deputy director of public information with the supreme court, and Ms Mary Beth Kuenzel, clerk of the Second District Court of Appeal, were among the presenters at a National Conference of Appellate Court Clerks session on the intersection of technology, law, and ethics. Finally, because the communication plan has become a model for other courts nationwide—and because of an interest in recognizing the twentieth anniversary of the 2000 presidential election—the Conference of Court Public Information Officers, the only professional organization dedicated to the role of court communicators worldwide, chose Tallahassee to be the locus of its 2020 annual meeting.



In addition to holding monthly conference calls to advance the communications goals outlined in the branch-wide court communication plan, the Florida Court Public Information Officers meet annually for an educational program; here, at their August 2019 program, PIOs listen attentively to a guest speaker.



## Education and Outreach

The judicial branch offers a bounty of resources and opportunities for Floridians 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 information about efforts to deepen public understanding of the third branch, including an extensive chronicle of endeavors to strengthen trust and confidence in Florida’s courts. Moreover, 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. In

addition, nearly all the state courts in Florida (and the Office of the State Courts Administrator) utilize various [social media](#) platforms—including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, podcasts, LinkedIn, and videos—to inform audiences both external and internal about the work of the court. 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 serious 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. (To learn more about the standards of ethical 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.



Judge Frederick Lauten (ret.), Ninth Circuit, moderates a Meet the Justices session at the Annual Reporters Workshop, hosted by the supreme court; pictured on either side of Judge Lauten are Justice Robert J. Luck (on left) and Justice Carlos G. Muñoz.

### 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, from 20 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. Funded by The Florida Bar Foundation, the program is coordinated and hosted by the supreme court.

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 successful strategies for supporting teachers' efforts to introduce their students to the vital role courts play in our society.



At this year's Supreme Court Teacher Institute, Justice C. Alan Lawson introduces institute fellows to the Fourth Amendment case that will be the basis for their mock oral argument.

### 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. (This link goes to information about [oral argument and the oral argument schedule](#).) 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](#).



After their mock oral argument, and after watching the justices conduct an oral argument on the very same case, the 2019 Supreme Court Teacher Institute fellows revel in the opportunity to pose for a group photo with the justices.

Visitors can also tour the public areas of the Florida Supreme Court Building. Groups of 10 or more adults 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. Even those who are not likely to venture to Tallahassee—or who would prefer to “visit” the court from the comfort of their homes—can take a brief, online [Self-Guided Tour of the Supreme Court of Florida](#).



Throughout the year, and especially during the 60-day legislative session, teachers from all across the state bring their students to the supreme court to learn about the third branch of government; here, Chief Justice Charles T. Canady welcomes a student group and answers their questions about the judicial branch.



Young visitors to the supreme court embrace the chance to participate in a mock oral argument at the Constitution Day event.



At the Mediation Day program at the supreme court each year, students who are studying conflict resolution visit the court for an education event; here, they practice resolving a hypothetical conflict through mediation.

Student groups are also warmly welcomed to the supreme court. Teachers can schedule their classes for the Educational Program, a 45-minute curriculum that includes a building tour and a teaching component (students learn about the branch, Florida’s courts system, and some supreme court history). Or students groups can be scheduled for a Mock Oral Argument Program, a 90-minute activity conducted by a staff attorney or knowledgeable volunteer that 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, during the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, more than 12,000 visitors of all ages came to the supreme court to learn about Florida’s judicial branch. In addition to the scheduled school groups and the small groups of



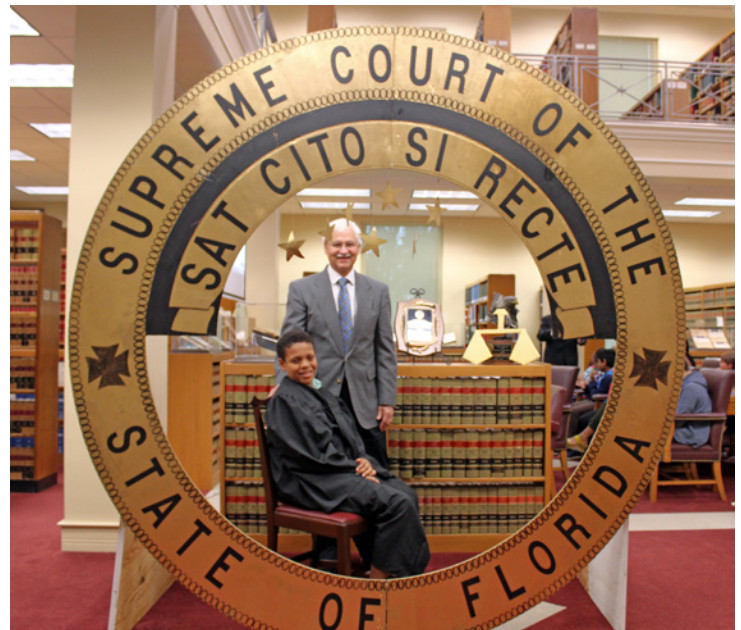
In the Florida Supreme Court Courtroom, Justice Jorge Labarga introduces a student group to the judicial branch and welcomes their questions.

unscheduled visitors, this total includes numerous adult leadership groups from all corners of Florida; legal groups; law school groups; college student groups; legislative intern groups; and specialty groups of young people (e.g., 4H, Girls State, Boys State). (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.

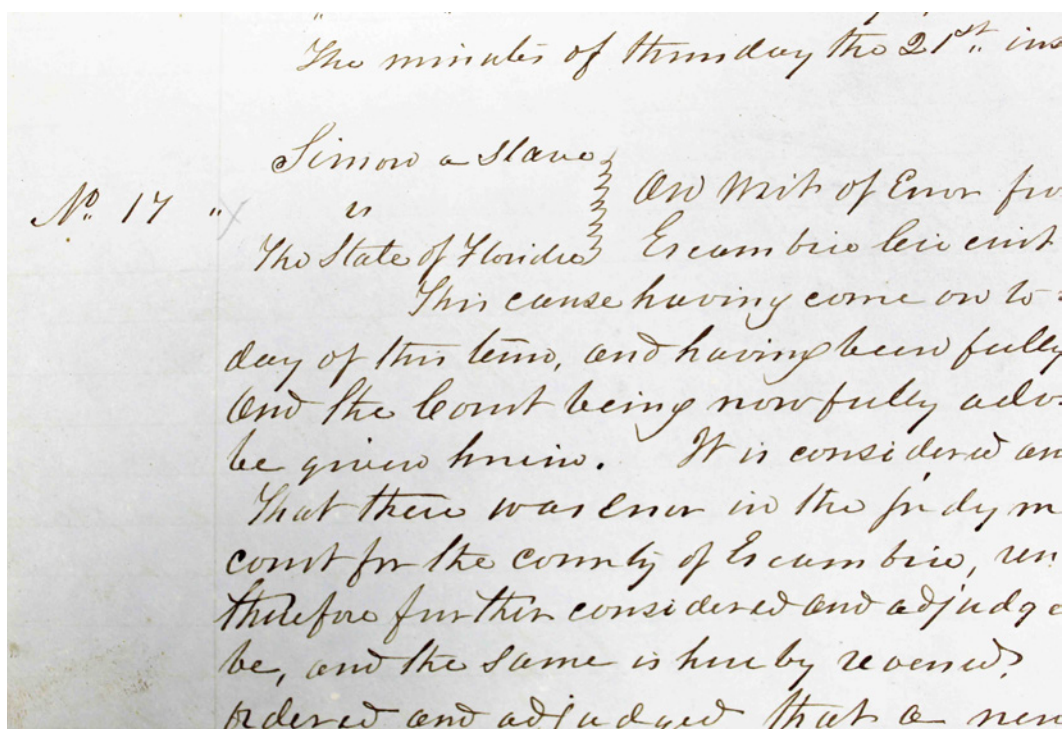
The library also harbors the supreme court archives, which contain primary documents of Florida Supreme Court history related to the court and its justices. In 1982, the supreme court librarian at the time had the notion of engaging the assistance of some of the dignitaries of the legal community to 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.



At the supreme court's Take Our Children to Work Day in April 2019, Justice Ricky Polston and his son Jonathan take a moment to pose in the Florida Supreme Court Seal—a massive, wooden, eight-foot-tall “stand-in;” this prop was designed for use as part of a theatrical production performed at a dinner celebrating the Supreme Court Sesquicentennial in May 1997.

Thanks to the steadfast partnership between the historical society and the library, the archives continue to thrive. For instance, former Justices Barbara Pariente and Peggy Quince, who both retired in January 2019, donated copious papers—office files, travel files, opinion files, speeches, and correspondence—to the archives. The archivist, Mr. Erik Robinson, completed arranging the 78 boxes of Justice Quince’s papers and will start inventorying them soon; he is in the process of completing the final arrangement of the 144 boxes of Justice Pariente’s papers. Though some of the papers are confidential, many of these records will soon be available to researchers, scholars, and other members of the public. The archivist also completed inventorying the papers donated by former Justice James Alderman (on the supreme court bench from 1978 – 85); these papers include speeches, personal and administrative work papers, court conference notes, opinion files, correspondence, and personal memorabilia. And he completed his inventory of the papers donated by former Justice James E.C. Perry (on the supreme court bench from 2009 – 16); these papers include professional correspondence, notebooks, and work papers.

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. Currently, the archivist is working on interleaving the scans and checking for accuracy of page succession. Future scanning projects will include the much shorter Tampa, Jacksonville, and Marianna Minute Books; these books were penned in the 1850s and 1860s, when the supreme court was required to meet in those cities.



This calligraphy is from the minute book of the Florida Supreme Court, when it met in Marianna (from March 1852 until March 1861—at which point, the court began meeting exclusively in Tallahassee). The case is *Simon, a Slave v. State of Florida*, in which a black man was threatened with lynching if he did not confess to an arson attack on a planter’s urban home in the City of Pensacola. On July 25, 1853, the court found in favor of Simon, stressing, in its published opinion, that intimidating a defendant into a confession goes against both common law and statute law.

The archives are also home to non-paper treasures. Recently brought out for display is an eight-foot-high “stand-in” of the Florida Supreme Court Seal. According to the court’s Office of Public Information, this massive wooden sphere was used as part of a theatrical production performed at a dinner celebrating the Florida Supreme Court Sesquicentennial on May 7, 1997, and had been lying about in storage, forgotten, all these years. Since it was placed in the library in early 2019, hundreds of adults and children have seized the opportunity to strike a somber pose, within the sphere, as Lady (or Gentleman) Justice.

Also during the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, library displays in the rotunda included a revised version of the Evolution of Justice exhibit, showcasing highlights from the rare book and archival collections. Materials related to justice during the Progressive Era (1901 – 26) were featured, including the recently donated 35-pound Underwood typewriter, manufactured in 1923, on which former Justice W. Glenn Terrell (on the supreme court bench from 1923 – 64) is said to have drafted many of his opinions.

Finally, the Office of Public Information continues expanding its outreach to the public with regular posts of a historical nature on [Facebook](#) and other social media. The library’s archives staff and the library director have contributed numerous historic court photos and historical information to this effort, helping the library to extend its outreach as well.

### 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 trust 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 enhancing 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.

**Long-Range Issue #4 Topics:**

- **Court Technology**
- **Emergency Preparedness**

**Court Technology**

Indispensable to the daily operations of the courts, technology has revolutionized 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 innovations like electronic filing (eFiling); data collection, data management, and case management systems; technology solutions designed to expand access to justice (e.g., remote court interpreting services, online dispute resolution, the DIY Florida project); the automation of numerous court-related processes; services for the mobile environment; and cybersecurity services.

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:

- To read about Virtual Remote Interpreting, the Trial Court Data Quality Initiative, and the Uniform Case Reporting System—projects spearheaded by the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability—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;
- For information about the courts system's six-county online dispute resolution pilot, see the article on [Alternative Dispute Resolution](#) 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 report reflecting on 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 on the Florida Courts website, under [Court Technology](#), find a description of other [current court technology projects](#).

Below are particulars about a number of recent “behind the scenes” technology initiatives and updates.

### e-Notify

Electronic notifications—which include communications like text and email alert reminders and information—have been shown to prompt more people to show up for court when they are required to do so, saving them a lot of difficulties (e.g., failure to appear is a separate criminal offence in Florida, carrying its own penalties)—and saving the state time and money (rescheduling cases is expensive and inefficient). With a \$750,000 appropriation from lawmakers for the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, OSCA personnel worked with the Florida clerks of court to develop an information technology platform that supports sending reminders and information to court participants about court events. The workgroup established an advisory group of judges and clerks of court; developed policy and other requirements and technical specifications for the platform; developed and conducted a competitive procurement; oversaw the work of the selected vendor in developing the platform; and collaborated on the development of web services to connect the platform to the Comprehensive Case Information System (a secured, single point of search for statewide court case information offered by the clerks of court). The platform is being implemented in two phases: a three-month pilot phase and then full, statewide implementation. Three counties are participating in the pilot, which began in fall 2019. In January 2020, the platform is expected to be available for statewide implementation for criminal case notifications; eventually, such reminders will be sent out for all case types.

### Criminal Courtroom Livescan/Identification Pilot

Manual fingerprinting imposes a considerable administrative burden on all parties involved. Fingerprinting occurs when a judgment of guilty is entered for a felony or for a misdemeanor petit theft or prostitution offense. At that point, a sheriff’s deputy obtains a manual ink 10-finger fingerprint roll from the defendant on a paper fingerprint card in open court and in the presence of the presiding judge. The fingerprints are affixed to the written judgment, and the judge signs below the fingerprints, indicating that the fingerprints were taken in his/her presence in open court. The manually-signed paper judgment is provided to the clerk of court. The clerk of court disseminates a scanned image of the fingerprints to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and sends certified paper copies of the judgment to the Department of Corrections.

With a federal grant, OSCA and the FDLE plan to purchase livescan equipment and associated programming and integration services to associate digital fingerprints with the defendant at the time of sentencing (for guilty judgments for felonies and for misdemeanor petit theft and prostitution offenses). Three circuits (the Fifth, Seventh, and Seventeenth) are participating in the Criminal Courtroom Livescan/Identification Pilot. Multiple benefits are associated with moving from a manual fingerprint process to an electronic process. This advancement supports goals of enhancing the quality, completeness, and accessibility of criminal history record information, as well as goals of improving the completeness, automation, and transmittal of records to state and federal systems. This effort will improve criminal record system processes and support reliable



This new audio/visual equipment is being used for meetings and trainings in the supreme court’s Judicial Meeting Room.



New voice-activated cameras in the Judicial Meeting Room have pre-set positions to capture video of whoever is speaking.

background checks. In addition to lightening the administrative burden, livescan fingerprinting will support court efforts to move toward a paperless system.

### Electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS)

A case management system for Florida's appellate courts, eFACTS has been gradually replacing the appellate courts' disparate case management systems, offering new and enhanced user features. 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, eFACTS tracks everything associated with appellate cases, including documents, scheduled events, communications, and case status. Other features include electronic document management, electronic workflows, electronic voting, calendaring, online docket, secured access to case information, and remote access via a secured web application. Since 2018, eFACTS has also accommodated electronic filing via the ePortal; portal integration began in December 2018, and all District Court of Appeal (DCA) implementations were completed in February 2019—10 months ahead of schedule. eFACTS enhancements are ongoing.



The new pan and tilt cameras in the Judicial Meeting Room are controllable for defined camera angles during meetings.

### Integrated Case Management System and OpenCourt

Beginning in July 2019, the Cross Jurisdictional Unit in the OIT took over the responsibility for developing, supporting, and maintaining the Integrated Case Management Solution (ICMS) and OpenCourt, two technology initiatives that support trial court due process functions. Created by the Eighth Circuit, both use open-source technology (i.e., the technology is available and free to the general public for use and/or modification from its original design), which significantly reduces startup costs and ongoing licensing expenses. ICMS is an application that provides judges and court staff with access to case-related data and performance metrics across all divisions; because the system is highly adaptable, it can be shaped to meet the criteria and business needs of other Florida circuit courts. And OpenCourt is a digital court recording system that enables jurisdictions to capture high-quality audio and video recordings of court events. The ICMS implementation for the Second, Fourth, and Sixteenth circuits is planned for the end of June 2020. And the latest version of OpenCourt is under development and will be ready for deployment by March 2020.



The new podium controls in the Judicial Meeting Room allow speakers to manage the room's audio and monitors while presenting.

### Disaster Recovery and Continuity of Operations

Disaster recovery and continuity of operations plans (DR/COOPs) are designed to address the delivery of services when something goes wrong (e.g., a server failure, a power failure, or a natural or human-made disaster). In an effort to minimize down time or service interruptions, OSCA has long had DR/COOPs in place. However, thanks to recent legislative funding, the OIT was positioned to develop a more robust approach to DR/COOPs during the 2018 – 19 fiscal year. This included moving the public-facing internet websites

of the supreme court, the five DCAs, and OSCA to a hosted solution (a cloud-hosted web service), where resources are secured off site; traditionally, all court websites have been hosted on premises, so this move represents a significant paradigm shift. In addition, mission critical items (e.g., email, file servers, databases, applications) are now co-located in a secure, off-site environment. The OIT is also working with an off-site data center to host redundant infrastructure. With these moves, the supreme court building is no longer the only point of connectivity between the branch and the rest of the world. Naturally, throughout all these transitions, the OIT works assiduously to ensure that the highest levels of security continue to be maintained.

### Information Security Program

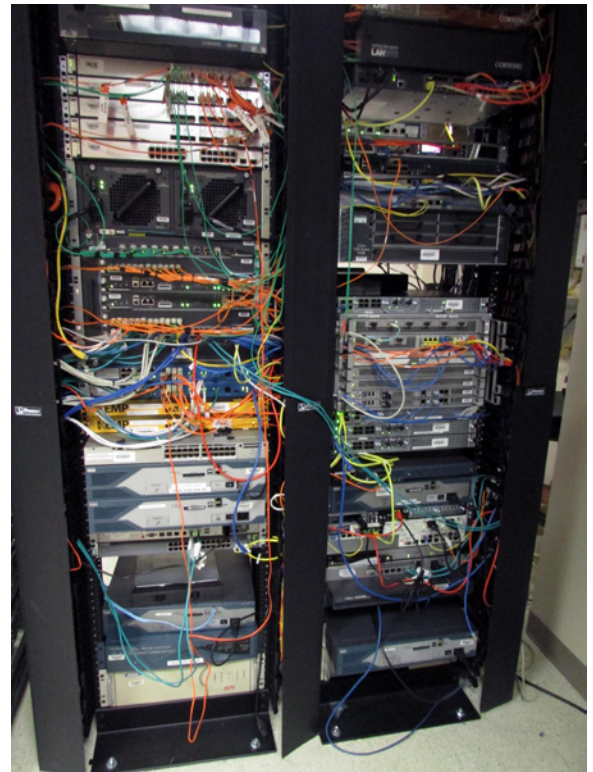
Protecting courts systems, data, and infrastructure is paramount in the digital age—and this is particularly true these days, given the unprecedented number of cyberattacks on state and local governments recently. With courts relying increasingly on technology for all their business processes, managing security risks has become a dynamic challenge that must be addressed incessantly. With legislative funding, the OIT began spearheading an information technology security risk assessment of the supreme court, the DCAs, and OSCA. The primary goal of this information security assessment is to determine the process, policy, and technology enhancements that must be implemented to best protect the branch and to minimize interruptions to the effective and timely administration of justice.

### Appellate Website Redesign

At the recommendation of the branch-wide communication plan, [Delivering Our Message](#), Florida courts reviewed their websites to ensure they effectively provide information about court processes and procedures, services available, and methods for accessing them. Recognizing that their web presence is the “face” of their court—and their primary communication tool—many of Florida’s courts revamped the organization and content of their websites. For the supreme court and the five DCAs, the process was undertaken in a concerted way, spearheaded by the Appellate Court Website 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, present information in a clear and organized fashion, and are accessible to all users; the new supreme court site has some similarities to the DCA sites but maintains a distinct look and feel. In addition to being easy to navigate, the new websites are also easy to update and maintain.

### Application Modernization

The aim of the Application Modernization project is to rejuvenate server infrastructure, which includes updating the hardware and software of numerous applications. While moving the applications to modern hardware,



Network infrastructure



This secondary natural gas generator powers the supreme court’s data center in the event of power loss that renders the main generator unresponsive.

the OIT has also updated the code and added enhancements (as well as providing “facelifts” for some applications so they look more contemporary). Thanks to these updates, the applications are more functional and reliable (updated hardware and software are less likely to suffer failures); in addition, the updated public-facing websites enable users to find the information they are seeking more easily. Application modernization is a two-phase project: currently, all old applications have been rewritten, and most are now in production. Target completion is June 30, 2020.



### 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](#), assigning it two charges: develop action plans for the supreme court for a variety of emergency situations, “including natural disasters, terrorism, and extended information systems outages”; and develop statewide emergency preparedness guidance for the entire judicial branch. He urged the workgroup to found its recommendations on two statewide branch policies: protect the lives and provide for the safety of judges, other constitutional officers, staff, and visitors to the court; and keep the courts open to ensure justice for the people. For he recognized that the security of the facilities and of everyone on their premises is central to the branch’s constitutional mandate to ensure that justice is administered without delay.

Emergency preparedness comprises preparation for unavoidable natural disasters such as pandemics, tropical storms, tornadoes, floods, and, of course, hurricanes (Florida is the nation’s most hurricane-prone state). It also includes 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 unending responsibility, and the judicial branch has taken a multi-pronged approach to meeting it: each court has 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. In addition, the branch 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. And, more recently, with the rise in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings, the supreme court created a Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security and a Trial Court Security Workgroup, which were established to develop security standards of operation and best practices.



This transfer switch transfers power between the two generators at the supreme court building.



Ms. Robyn Gable, trial court administrator at the Fourteenth Circuit, conducts a session on Preparing for the Worst, Hoping for the Best: Lessons Learned from Hurricane Michael at the 2019 education program of the Florida Court Public Information Officers.

## Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Emergencies

Generally, Florida's most treacherous nature-induced disasters are hurricane-related, and in 2018 – 19, the branch's emergency preparedness efforts were largely focused on readying for and recovering from the devastations wrought by Hurricane Michael in October 2018. Michael struck the Panhandle, leaving a trail of destruction for 80 miles, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Georgia border: it blasted communities and their courts, taking lives, destroying property, and crippling 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 even now, more than a year later, the Fourteenth Circuit is operating out of alternate facilities in Bay and Jackson counties. During the 2019 session, lawmakers appropriated \$1 million to assist Jackson County with repairs and replacement of furniture and equipment; work is underway now to repair the facility so that the court can move back in. Bay County, which received no appropriation, will be undergoing repairs and renovations for some time to come.



At the 2019 education program of the Florida Court Public Information Officers, Mr. Steven Hall, chief of General Services, Office of the State Courts Administrator, participates in a session on Preparing for the Worst, Hoping for the Best. Mr. Hall is the statewide security coordinator for the trial courts.

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, the Fourteenth Circuit lacked any means of communication, and even some local law enforcement lacked communication means, so Mr. Steven Hall, chief of the General Services Unit, Office of the State Court's Administrator (OSCA) as well as 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 offered several "lessons learned," highlighting 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 (the latter was established under the auspices of the Judicial Management Council).

The Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security submitted its final report to the supreme court in June 2018; among its recommendations, 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.

And the Trial Court Security Workgroup submitted its final report to the supreme court in June 2018; recommendations addressed model courthouse security practices, fundamental elements of trial court facility security, training recommendations, security funding practices, statewide incident reporting, and partnership opportunities. The workgroup recognized that each courthouse in Florida is unique—and that local judges, court staff, law enforcement officials, and county government representatives are best positioned to determine which security protocols best fit individual local circumstances; thus the recommendations were designed to provide options without prescribing a particular security solution for any individual county's courthouse. The final report was approved by the supreme court in September 2018, and implementation began, shepherded by the local trial court security coordinators in concert with the Mr. Hall, the statewide security coordinator.

Finally, lawmakers, during the 2019 session, approved funding for an OSCA position whose focus is to support and enhance emergency preparedness, management, and response capabilities and activities and to assist with information gathering, resource preparation, and coordination of the appointed trial court security coordinators. (Take this link for more information about the [judicial branch's emergency preparedness efforts](#).)

## 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.*

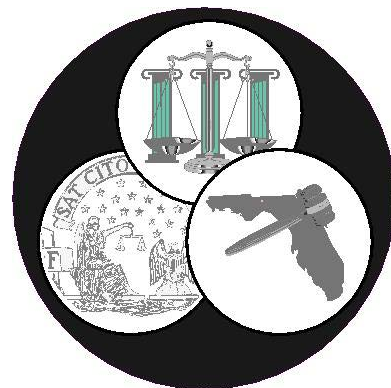
To meet the demands of justice in the twenty-first century—and to foster the public's trust and confidence in the justice system—judicial officers and court staff must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve and perform at the highest levels of expertise. Recognizing this imperative, the long-range 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.”

#### Long-Range Issue #5 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. These groups include the many courts 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, the General Services Unit, and the statewide ADA coordinator—commonly conduct or facilitate trainings for judicial officers and court employees. Readers can learn about this bounty 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.

### 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 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 professional 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 abreast of changes in the law, providing for a more professional and knowledgeable judiciary. During the 2018 – 19 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).



At the 2019 Conference of County Court Judges of Florida, Judge David L. Denkin, Sarasota County (on left), was presented with the Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence.

Education programs were also offered by the two judicial colleges during the fiscal year. Approximately 125 judges, magistrates, and child support hearing officers attended the Florida Judicial College, a three-phase



Mr. John Tomasino, clerk of the Florida Supreme Court, and Ms. Kristina Samuels, clerk of the First District Court of Appeal, conduct a session on Supreme Court Jurisdiction for the New Appellate Judges Program, held in Tallahassee in April 2019.

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 designed to help judges become proficient in advanced subject matters with which a judge may come in contact. During the course of the year, the FCEC also sponsored a DUI Adjudication Lab (55 participants); a Faculty Training Specialty Course, a two-day program that teaches judges how to be more effective teachers of other judges (37 participants); and a Handling Capital Cases Program, required of all judges prior to sitting on capital cases (40 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 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 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the foundation provided funding for thirteen local training programs on topics such as High Performance Culture, Professional Development, Building Your Team, How to Become a Great Communicator,



At the 2019 Florida Conference of Circuit Judges, Judge Scott M. Bernstein, Eleventh Circuit (on right), was presented with the Chief Justice Award for Judicial Excellence.



One of the benefits of holding the New Appellate Judges Program in Tallahassee is that participants have a chance to meet and interact informally with the supreme court justices. On day one of the program, everyone meets together over lunch, and the justices share some words of wisdom about being an appellate judge.

Competency Based Leadership, and Opinion Writing and Advanced Legal Editing. Funding assistance was also provided to one court personnel group—trial court staff attorneys—for a statewide program (several other statewide programs had to be cancelled due to Hurricane Michael). Also in the 2018 – 19 fiscal year, the FCEC supported a Trial Court Administrators Education Program on Executive Decision-Making (40 participants).

The foundation's biggest event of the year was the Florida Court Personnel Institute, a statewide program that provides concrete job skills training on a variety of subjects useful to court employees. The February 2019 program, in which 200 court employees participated, had five tracks: one for appellate law clerks; one for case managers; one on Purposes and Responsibilities of Courts and another on Caseflow and Workflow Management; and a Faculty Training, which teaches court employees how to be more effective teachers of other court staff (also during the fiscal year, two additional faculty trainings were held, attended by 35 court employees).

### 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*; *An Aid to Understanding Canon 7* (updated twice); *Contempt Benchguide*; *Florida Traffic-Related Appellate Opinion Summaries* (updated four times); *Handling Florida Cases Involving Self-Represented Litigants: A Manual for Florida Courts*; *Interpersonal Violence Case Law Summaries – Civil and Criminal* (updated eight times); *Judicial Administration Benchguide*; *Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee Opinions Topical Index* (updated twice); *Judicial Ethics Benchguide*; and *Pandemic Influenza Benchguide: Issues Concerning Quarantine and Isolation*.

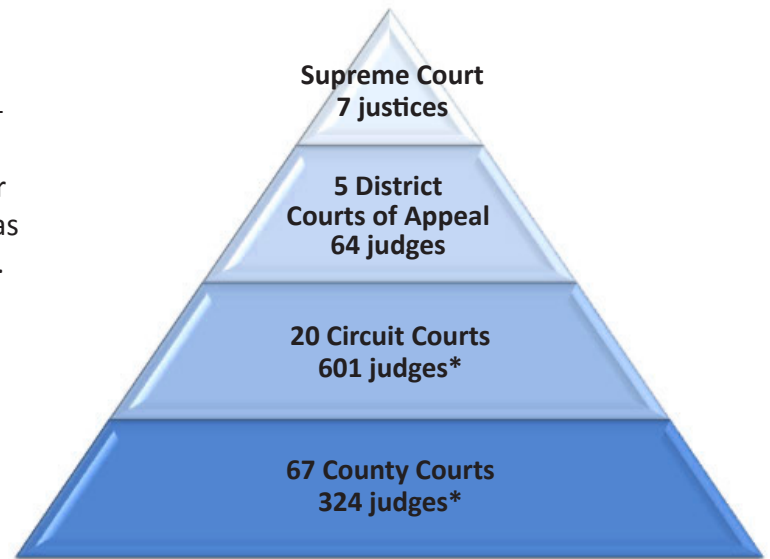
In addition, OSCA has been engaged in an e-Learning Project, an initial step in its electronic learning plan. Spearheaded by the Innovations and Outreach Unit, the project provided for the development of three e-learning modules: “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace,” “IT Fundamentals: Password and Email Security,” and “Public Records Requirements.” The first two modules were released to OSCA employees in spring 2019 and achieved full completion rates; the third module is complete, awaiting final review. These modules, which allow for interactive, asynchronous learning, have the potential to reach all Florida State Courts System employees. In focusing on e-learning, OSCA aims to respond to employees’ interest in 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

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

### County Courts

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

\* In 2019, lawmakers funded four new judgeships: two circuit and two county; the numbers above reflect the additional judgeships.

# 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 DCA, a chief judge, who is selected by the body of district court judges, is responsible for the administrative duties of the court. The DCAs decide most appeals from circuit court cases and many administrative law appeals from actions by the executive branch. In addition, the DCAs must review county court decisions invalidating a provision of Florida's constitution or statutes, may review decisions of a county court that are certified by the county court to be of great public importance, and, effective January 1, 2020, must review appeals of county court decisions when the amount in controversy exceeds \$15,000.

## 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 exceeding \$15,000 (threshold increased to "over \$30,000," effective January 1, 2020). They also hear some appeals from county court decisions for cases with an amount in controversy up to and including \$15,000 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 (threshold

### DCA

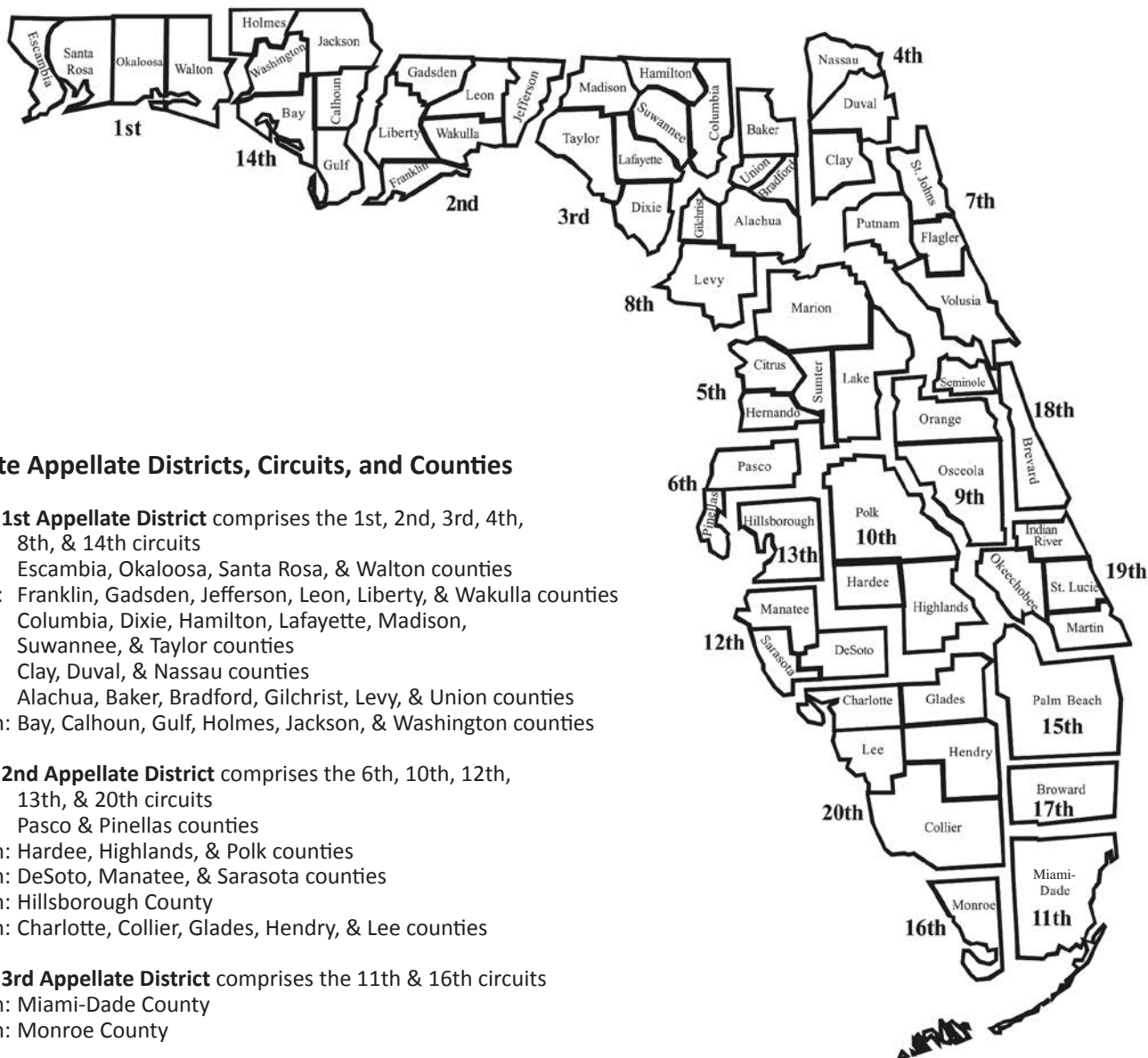
First District:	circuits 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 14
Second District:	circuits 6, 10, 12, 13, 20
Third District:	circuits 11, 16
Fourth District:	circuits 15, 17, 19
Fifth District:	circuits 5, 7, 9, 18

### 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

increased to "up to and including \$30,000," effective January 1, 2020). In addition, county court judges may hear simplified dissolution of marriage cases.

# 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

# COURT ADMINISTRATION

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## 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 Lisa Kiel, State Courts Administrator

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 <https://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.stml>.

## Marshals of the Supreme Court and the District Courts of Appeal

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

# COURT COMMITTEES

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## 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, and [AOSC19-40](#).

## 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 [AOSC19-32](#).

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 that will effectively carry out the administration of justice. For more information, see [Florida Rule of Judicial Administration](#) 2.230 and [AOSC19-39](#).

# COURT COMMITTEES

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[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 [AOSC19-10](#).

[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 [AOSC19-16](#).

[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 [AOSC19-38](#).

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 [AOSC19-34](#).

## 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 [AOSC19-25](#).

[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](#).

# COURT COMMITTEES

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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](#) 2.244.

[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 [AOSC19-64](#).

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 [AOSC19-31](#).

## 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)].

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 Mediator Qualifications and Discipline 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.

## COURT COMMITTEES

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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 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 [AOSC19-35](#).

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](#) 14.110.

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](#) 2.140(h).

# JUDICIAL CERTIFICATION TABLE

## JUDICIAL CERTIFICATION TABLE, 2010 - 2019

### District Court of Appeal

Session Year	Requested	Net Certified*	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
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
2019	0	0	0	n/a	64

### Judicial Certification

The supreme court has used a weighted caseload system to evaluate the need for new trial court judgeships since 1999, and, for DCA judges, since 2006. The weighted caseload system analyzes Florida's caseload statistics according to complexity. Cases that are complex, such as capital murder cases, receive a higher weight, while cases that are 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 [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. In the 2019 legislative session, lawmakers funded four new judgeships: two circuit (one in the Ninth Circuit and one in the Twelfth Circuit) and two county (one in Flagler County and one in Citrus County).

\* *Net Certified* signifies the difference between the number of positions the supreme court certified and the number it decertified.

### Circuit

Session Year	Requested	Net Certified*	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2010	40	37	0	0%	599
2011	40	26	0	0%	599
2012	31	23	0	0%	599
2013	27	16	0	0%	599
2014	24	7	0	0%	599
2015	15	3	0	0%	599
2016	13	1	0	0%	599
2017	13	4	0	0%	599
2018	8	2	0	0%	599
2019	12	4	2	50%	601

### County

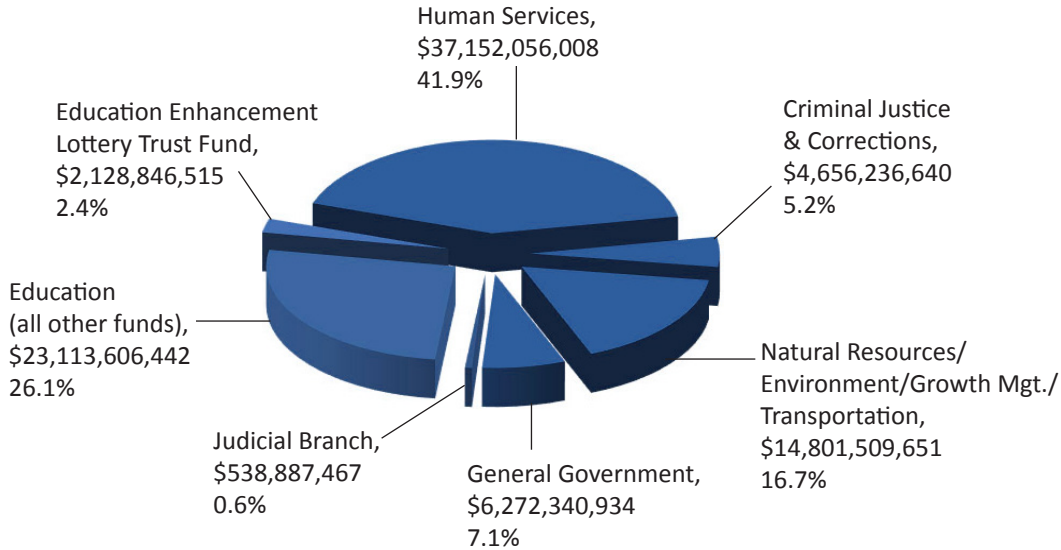
Session Year	Requested	Net Certified*	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2010	54	53	0	0%	322
2011	55	54	0	0%	322
2012	49	48	0	0%	322
2013	49	47	0	0%	322
2014	42	39	0	0%	322
2015	36	32	0	0%	322
2016	26	23	0	0%	322
2017	9	2	0	0%	322
2018	7	2	0	0%	322
2019	6	1	2	200%	324

# FLORIDA'S BUDGET

## FLORIDA'S BUDGET, FY 2018 - 2019 and FY 2019 - 2020

[\(For an accessible version of the FY 2018- 2019 and the FY 2019 - 2020 state budget, please follow this link\)](#)

### 2018-2019 Fiscal Year

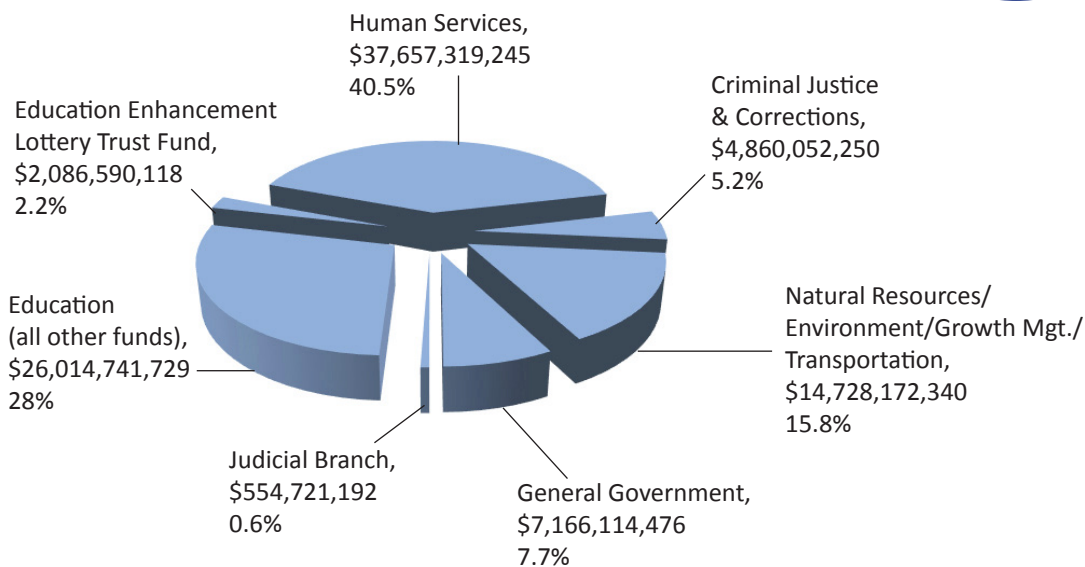


**Total State Appropriations: \$88,663,483,657**

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

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

### 2019-2020 Fiscal Year



**Total State Appropriations: \$93,067,711,350**

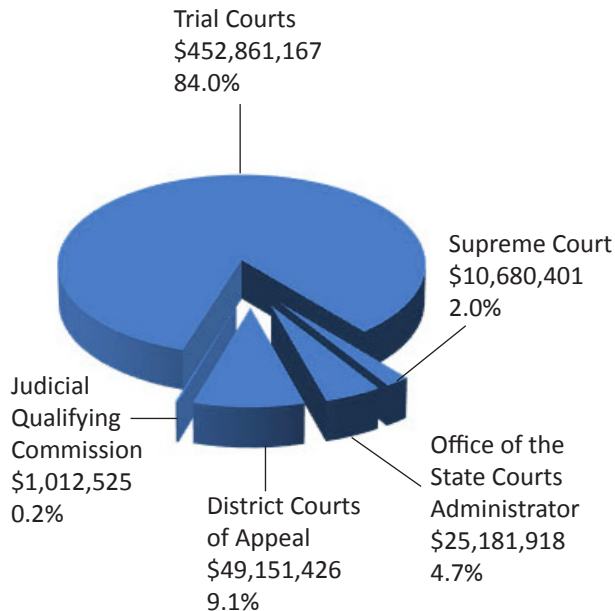
Note: This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 2500A, less the governor's vetoes.

# STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS

## STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS, FY 2018 - 2019 and FY 2019 - 2020

(For an accessible version of the FY 2018-19 and the FY 2019-20 appropriations, please follow [this link](#))

### 2018-2019 Fiscal Year



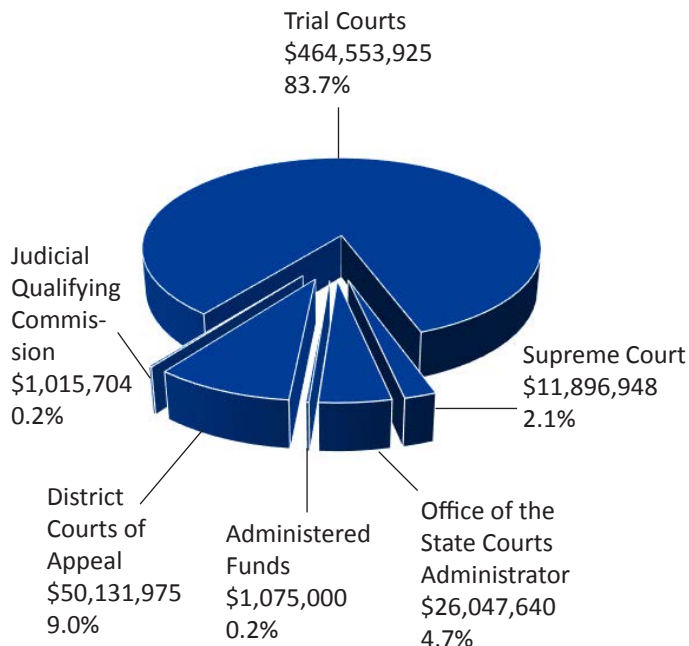
#### State Courts System Total: \$538,887,467

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
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,451,344,568</b>

### 2019-2020 Fiscal Year



#### State Courts System Total: \$554,721,192

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 2500, less the governor's vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$24 million (\$1.6 million non-recurring) for pass through/legislative project funding.]

#### Justice System Appropriations

State Courts System	\$554,721,192
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$118,511,299
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$52,860,938
State Attorneys	\$472,699,719
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$231,841,838
Public Defenders Appellate	\$16,786,470
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$11,243,159
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$51,829,025
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,510,493,640</b>

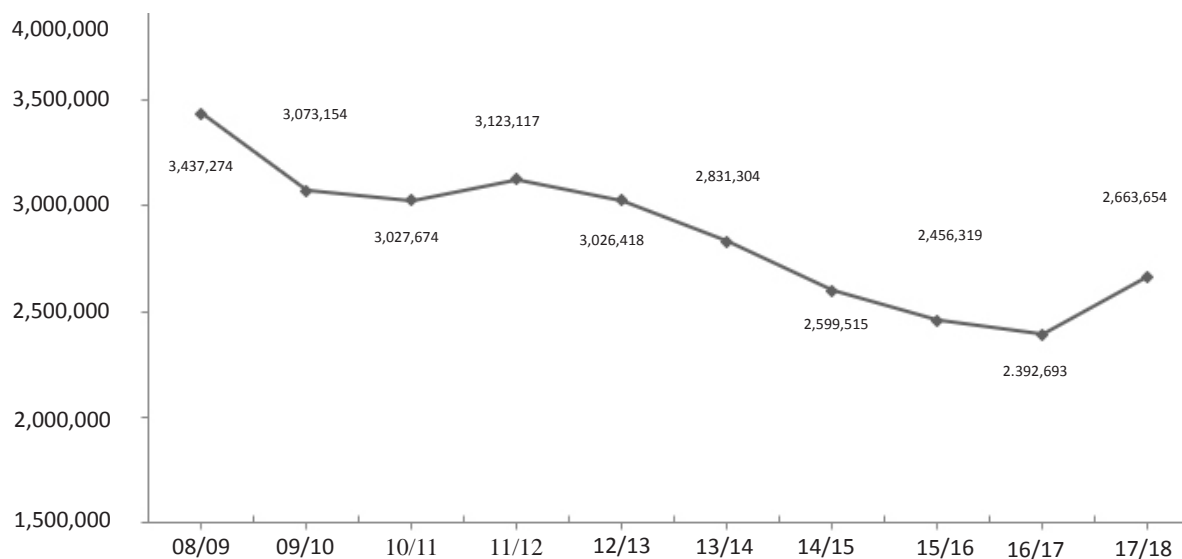
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

## FILINGS, FLORIDA COUNTY COURTS

**FY 2008 - 2009 to FY 2017 - 2018\***

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

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 until January 1, 2020, at which time the threshold increased to \$8,000); county civil (\$5,001 to \$15,000 until January 1, 2020, at which time the range increased to \$8,001 to \$30,000); other county civil; evictions; and civil traffic infractions.



### Filings Overview

Although the total county civil filings trended upward in fiscal year 2017-18, the number of county criminal filings is at its lowest point since 1986, which is the earliest year of accessible data. The continued decline in criminal cases mirrors national trends and reflects fewer arrests and the continued use of diversionary methods.

The number of county civil filings, specifically in small claims and other county civil case types, increased, in part due to the impact of damages resulting from Hurricane Irma in 2017 and Hurricane Michael in 2018. Because of these increases, along with increased civil traffic infractions (which average 84% of the total county civil filings), fiscal year 2017-18 marked the end of a five-year decline in county court filings.

### Recent Trends

Statewide, county courts reported an 11.3% filings increase during fiscal year 2017-18. The majority of this increase was the result of a 21.1% increase in small claims, a 15.8% increase in civil traffic infractions, and a 15.5% increase in county civil claims between \$5,001 and \$15,000.

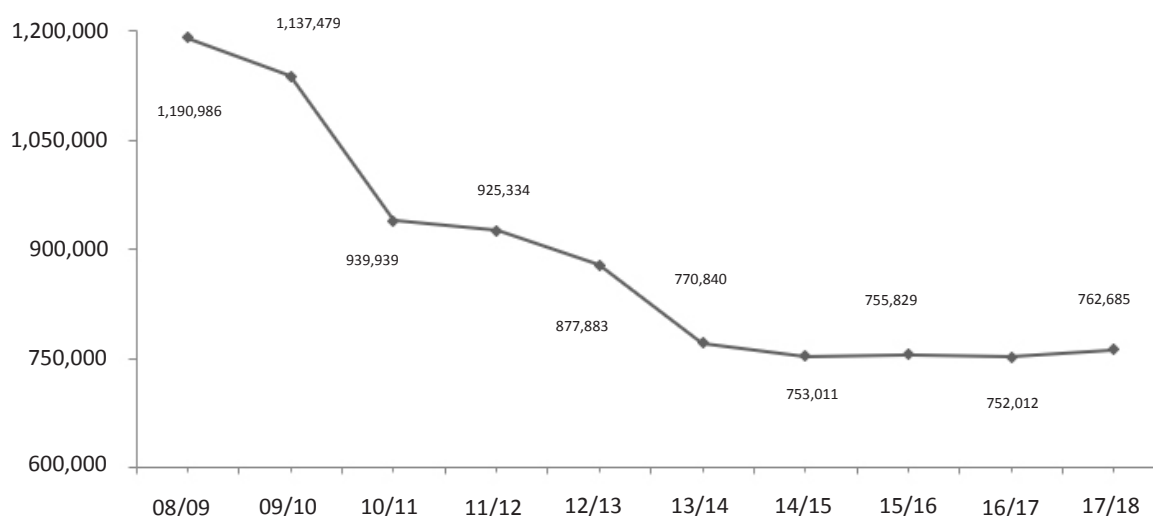
\* Filings Overview statements are based on prior 10 years of data. All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification. [From this link, readers may access additional statistical information about Florida's courts.](#)

## FILINGS, FLORIDA CIRCUIT COURTS

FY 2008 - 2009 to FY 2017 - 2018\*

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

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

The number of felonies reached a near all-time high in fiscal year 2007-08 and has since been declining. The recent increase in the criminal division is mostly attributable to an increase in drug offense-related case types.

The total filings in the probate division have increased for 10 consecutive years. The increases largely reflect the continued growth of Baker Act (mental health) and probate cases.

Filings in circuit court have changed dramatically since 2008, resulting from factors related to the Great Recession. In fiscal year 2008-09, recession-related case types, including contracts and foreclosures, were at their peak level. The 2010 moratorium on foreclosure cases led to a 117% decrease in these filings. Now, nine years later, foreclosure filings have returned to 2006 levels.

### Recent Trends

Circuit court filings increased by 1.4% from fiscal year 2016-17 to 2017-18. Circuit criminal court showed increases in the following case types: 14.8% in narcotics/drug-related crimes; 6.3% in other criminal cases; 1.9% in capital murder cases; and 4.3% in other crimes against persons. Circuit civil court reported an increase of 22.1% in contract and indebtedness filings; 22.6% in other civil cases; and 17.2% in product liability cases.

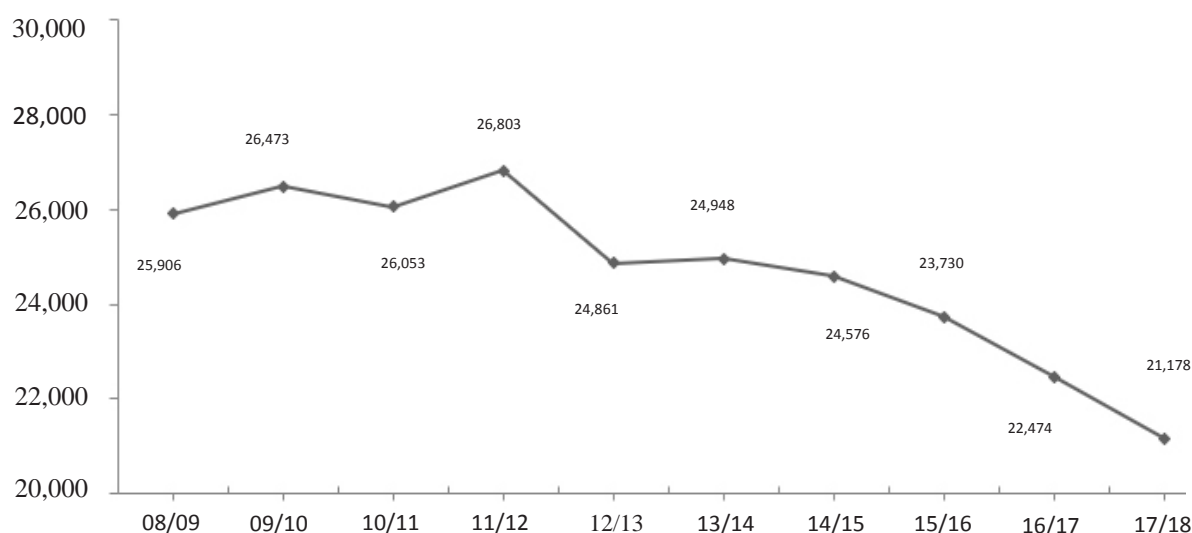
\* Filings Overview statements are based on prior 10 years of data. All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification. [From this link, readers may access additional statistical information about Florida's courts.](#)

## FILINGS, FLORIDA DISTRICT COURTS OF APPEAL

**FY 2008 - 2009 to FY 2017 - 2018\***

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

Florida's district courts of appeal decide all matters not directly appealable to the supreme court or a circuit court as well as most 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 mirror previous years' decreased filing trends in the trial courts.

### Recent Trends

In fiscal year 2017-18, district court filings decreased statewide by 5.8%. Case types driving the total decrease include workers' compensation cases at 17.0%; administrative cases at 8.8%; and family-related cases at 8.5%.

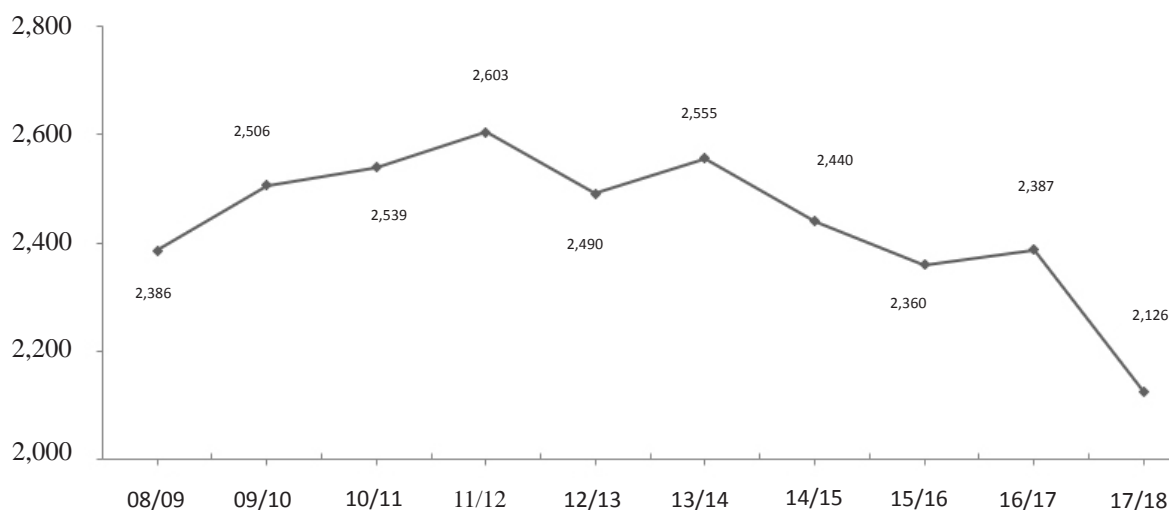
\* Filings Overview statements are based on prior 10 years of data. All data provided above have undergone an extensive, six-month review process including audit, examination, and verification.

## FILINGS, FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

FY 2008 - 2009 to FY 2017- 2018\*

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

The Florida Supreme Court hears 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 filings increase in fiscal year 2016-17 was 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

The Florida Supreme Court reported a 10.9% decrease in overall filings. However, cases in the category of "Other Original Jurisdiction" increased by 20.2%, and cases in the category of "Other Mandatory Review" increased by 17.6%. Further, a significant increase in initial death penalty appeals cases occurred from fiscal year 2016-17 to fiscal year 2017-18.

\* Filings Overview statements are based on prior 10 years of data. 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 - 2018](#), please follow this link.

# DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

## DISTRICT COURT of APPEAL FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY, FY 2017 - 2018

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

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
All	Administrative	1,017
All	Civil	5,621
All	Criminal	7,471
All	Criminal Post Conviction*	4,351
All	Family	1,188
All	Juvenile	1,128
All	Probate/Guardianship	217
All	Workers' Compensation	185
		<b>21,178</b>

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
1	Administrative	636	3	Administrative	81	5	Administrative	81
	Civil	998		Civil	1,160		Civil	840
	Criminal	2,084		Criminal	526		Criminal	1,755
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	1,180		Criminal Post-Conviction*	385		Criminal Post-Conviction*	953
	Family	210		Family	196		Family	258
	Juvenile	209		Juvenile	233		Juvenile	211
	Probate/Guardianship	14		Probate/Guardianship	40		Probate/Guardianship	48
	Workers' Compensation	185			<b>2,621</b>			<b>4,146</b>
		<b>5,516</b>						
2	Administrative	104	4	Administrative	115	<b>Total</b>		<b>21,178</b>
	Civil	1,253		Civil	1,370			
	Criminal	1,906		Criminal	1,200			
	Criminal Post-Conviction*	1,214		Criminal Post-Conviction*	619			
	Family	224		Family	300			
	Juvenile	263		Juvenile	212			
	Probate/Guardianship	41		Probate/Guardianship	74			
		<b>5,005</b>			<b>3,890</b>			

\* Criminal post-conviction filings include notice of appeal only.

## TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2017 - 2018

(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	177,419
All	All	Civil	180,881
All	All	Family Court*	278,317
All	All	Probate	126,068
All	All	County Adult Criminal	577,819
All	All	County Civil**	2,085,835
			<b>3,426,339</b>

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

## TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2017 - 2018

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

Circuit	Division	Total Filings
1	Adult Criminal	12,344
	Civil	4,640
	Family Court*	12,357
	Probate	5,085
	County Adult Criminal	26,878
	County Civil**	30,759
		<b>92,063</b>
2	Adult Criminal	4,887
	Civil	3,391
	Family Court*	6,128
	Probate	3,358
	County Adult Criminal	10,218
	County Civil**	18,080
		<b>46,062</b>
3	Adult Criminal	2,503
	Civil	1,062
	Family Court*	3,429
	Probate	1,247
	County Adult Criminal	5,460
	County Civil**	10,383
		<b>24,084</b>
4	Adult Criminal	8,370
	Civil	9,524
	Family Court*	19,458
	Probate	7,180
	County Adult Criminal	42,337
	County Civil**	151,730
		<b>238,599</b>
5	Adult Criminal	10,629
	Civil	7,130
	Family Court*	15,152
	Probate	8,548
	County Adult Criminal	24,856
	County Civil**	41,613
		<b>107,928</b>
6	Adult Criminal	17,684
	Civil	11,031
	Family Court*	18,893
	Probate	10,933
	County Adult Criminal	46,361
	County Civil**	65,091
		<b>169,993</b>
7	Adult Criminal	9,346
	Civil	6,466
	Family Court*	12,464
	Probate	6,614
	County Adult Criminal	36,795
	County Civil**	55,771
		<b>127,456</b>

Circuit	Division	Total Filings
8	Adult Criminal	4,022
	Civil	1,954
	Family Court*	4,989
	Probate	2,939
	County Adult Criminal	10,562
	County Civil**	18,959
		<b>43,425</b>
9	Adult Criminal	14,012
	Civil	15,434
	Family Court*	23,097
	Probate	7,016
	County Adult Criminal	38,692
	County Civil**	297,565
		<b>395,816</b>
10	Adult Criminal	10,225
	Civil	5,107
	Family Court*	14,379
	Probate	5,662
	County Adult Criminal	25,557
	County Civil**	35,972
		<b>96,902</b>
11	Adult Criminal	13,674
	Civil	36,231
	Family Court*	30,365
	Probate	12,431
	County Adult Criminal	65,974
	County Civil**	666,030
		<b>824,705</b>
12	Adult Criminal	6,347
	Civil	4,629
	Family Court*	9,075
	Probate	6,731
	County Adult Criminal	18,929
	County Civil**	33,280
		<b>78,991</b>
13	Adult Criminal	12,543
	Civil	11,081
	Family Court*	22,719
	Probate	8,066
	County Adult Criminal	38,038
	County Civil**	111,281
		<b>203,728</b>
14	Adult Criminal	6,890
	Civil	1,800
	Family Court*	5,794
	Probate	1,908
	County Adult Criminal	14,451
	County Civil**	12,542
		<b>43,385</b>

Circuit	Division	Total Filings
15	Adult Criminal	8,194
	Civil	14,537
	Family Court*	13,936
	Probate	8,745
	County Adult Criminal	50,257
	County Civil**	137,344
		<b>233,013</b>
16	Adult Criminal	1,049
	Civil	1,240
	Family Court*	1,122
	Probate	507
	County Adult Criminal	3,038
	County Civil**	10,059
		<b>17,015</b>
17	Adult Criminal	11,666
	Civil	25,285
	Family Court*	27,694
	Probate	9,742
	County Adult Criminal	39,636
	County Civil**	239,092
		<b>353,115</b>
18	Adult Criminal	9,230
	Civil	6,826
	Family Court*	13,030
	Probate	5,899
	County Adult Criminal	28,349
	County Civil**	61,583
		<b>124,917</b>
19	Adult Criminal	5,450
	Civil	4,464
	Family Court*	7,768
	Probate	4,283
	County Adult Criminal	16,705
	County Civil**	30,504
		<b>69,174</b>
20	Adult Criminal	8,354
	Civil	9,049
	Family Court*	16,468
	Probate	9,174
	County Adult Criminal	34,726
	County Civil**	58,197
		<b>135,968</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,426,339</b>

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

## TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION, FY 2017 - 2018

(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	6,019	2 Leon	Adult Criminal	3,320	3 Madison	Adult Criminal	280
	Civil	1,972		Civil	2,735		Civil	90
	Family Court*	5,672		Family Court*	4,345		Family Court*	315
	Probate	2,754		Probate	2,482		Probate	106
	County Adult Criminal	12,665		County Adult Criminal	6,988		County Adult Criminal	503
	County Civil**	10,604		County Civil**	12,895		County Civil**	2,872
		<b>39,686</b>			<b>32,765</b>			<b>4,166</b>
1 Okaloosa	Adult Criminal	3,098	2 Liberty	Adult Criminal	180	3 Suwannee	Adult Criminal	556
	Civil	1,196		Civil	34		Civil	250
	Family Court*	3,450		Family Court*	159		Family Court*	718
	Probate	1,269		Probate	39		Probate	283
	County Adult Criminal	6,674		County Adult Criminal	191		County Adult Criminal	993
	County Civil**	12,323		County Civil**	440		County Civil**	1,664
		<b>28,010</b>			<b>1,043</b>			<b>4,464</b>
1 Santa Rosa	Adult Criminal	2,332	2 Wakulla	Adult Criminal	426	3 Taylor	Adult Criminal	291
	Civil	882		Civil	191		Civil	114
	Family Court*	2,127		Family Court*	541		Family Court*	406
	Probate	681		Probate	143		Probate	148
	County Adult Criminal	4,791		County Adult Criminal	737		County Adult Criminal	672
	County Civil**	6,115		County Civil**	849		County Civil**	970
		<b>16,928</b>			<b>2,887</b>			<b>2,601</b>
1 Walton	Adult Criminal	895	3 Columbia	Adult Criminal	763	4 Clay	Adult Criminal	1,258
	Civil	590		Civil	416		Civil	1,199
	Family Court*	1,108		Family Court*	1,219		Family Court*	2,701
	Probate	381		Probate	478		Probate	746
	County Adult Criminal	2,748		County Adult Criminal	2,101		County Adult Criminal	3,698
	County Civil**	1,717		County Civil**	3,245		County Civil**	13,553
		<b>7,439</b>			<b>8,222</b>			<b>23,155</b>
2 Franklin	Adult Criminal	242	3 Dixie	Adult Criminal	171	4 Duval	Adult Criminal	6,325
	Civil	84		Civil	67		Civil	7,840
	Family Court*	225		Family Court*	335		Family Court*	15,582
	Probate	86		Probate	102		Probate	6,012
	County Adult Criminal	832		County Adult Criminal	427		County Adult Criminal	36,030
	County Civil**	320		County Civil**	479		County Civil**	135,609
		<b>1,789</b>			<b>1,581</b>			<b>207,398</b>
2 Gadsden	Adult Criminal	528	3 Hamilton	Adult Criminal	329	4 Nassau	Adult Criminal	787
	Civil	274		Civil	94		Civil	485
	Family Court*	709		Family Court*	302		Family Court*	1,175
	Probate	527		Probate	91		Probate	422
	County Adult Criminal	1,102		County Adult Criminal	648		County Adult Criminal	2,609
	County Civil**	2,979		County Civil**	839		County Civil**	2,568
		<b>6,119</b>			<b>2,303</b>			<b>8,046</b>
2 Jefferson	Adult Criminal	191	3 Lafayette	Adult Criminal	113	5 Citrus	Adult Criminal	1,115
	Civil	73		Civil	31		Civil	913
	Family Court*	149		Family Court*	134		Family Court*	1,987
	Probate	81		Probate	39		Probate	954
	County Adult Criminal	368		County Adult Criminal	116		County Adult Criminal	2,232
	County Civil**	597		County Civil**	314		County Civil**	4,052
		<b>1,459</b>			<b>747</b>			<b>11,253</b>

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

Circuit/County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit/ County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit/County	Division	Total Filings
5	Hernando		7	St. Johns		9	Orange	
	Adult Criminal	2,368		Adult Criminal	1,409		Adult Criminal	11,060
	Civil	1,289		Civil	1,441		Civil	11,983
	Family Court*	2,837		Family Court*	2,288		Family Court*	18,055
	Probate	2,494		Probate	1,038		Probate	5,561
	County Adult Criminal	4,384		County Adult Criminal	5,489		County Adult Criminal	31,092
	County Civil**	9,241		County Civil**	9,530		County Civil**	275,753
		<b>22,613</b>			<b>21,195</b>			<b>353,504</b>
5	Lake		7	Volusia		9	Osceola	
	Adult Criminal	2,671		Adult Criminal	5,970		Adult Criminal	2,952
	Civil	2,244		Civil	3,879		Civil	3,451
	Family Court*	3,934		Family Court*	7,619		Family Court*	5,042
	Probate	2,096		Probate	4,556		Probate	1,455
	County Adult Criminal	7,912		County Adult Criminal	24,837		County Adult Criminal	7,600
	County Civil**	14,144		County Civil**	41,288		County Civil**	21,812
		<b>33,001</b>			<b>88,149</b>			<b>42,312</b>
5	Marion		8	Alachua		10	Hardee	
	Adult Criminal	3,338		Adult Criminal	2,331		Adult Criminal	333
	Civil	2,299		Civil	1,232		Civil	115
	Family Court*	5,656		Family Court*	2,942		Family Court*	450
	Probate	2,402		Probate	2,239		Probate	118
	County Adult Criminal	7,729		County Adult Criminal	6,277		County Adult Criminal	1,142
	County Civil**	9,433		County Civil**	13,648		County Civil**	2,610
		<b>30,857</b>			<b>28,669</b>			<b>4,768</b>
5	Sumter		8	Baker		10	Highlands	
	Adult Criminal	1,137		Adult Criminal	470		Adult Criminal	1,029
	Civil	385		Civil	134		Civil	620
	Family Court*	738		Family Court*	460		Family Court*	1,366
	Probate	602		Probate	218		Probate	850
	County Adult Criminal	2,599		County Adult Criminal	813		County Adult Criminal	2,019
	County Civil**	4,743		County Civil**	915		County Civil**	2,538
		<b>10,204</b>			<b>3,010</b>			<b>8,422</b>
6	Pasco		8	Bradford		10	Polk	
	Adult Criminal	6,045		Adult Criminal	412		Adult Criminal	8,863
	Civil	3,542		Civil	184		Civil	4,372
	Family Court*	6,589		Family Court*	364		Family Court*	12,563
	Probate	3,484		Probate	130		Probate	4,694
	County Adult Criminal	14,143		County Adult Criminal	1,104		County Adult Criminal	22,396
	County Civil**	19,122		County Civil**	1,820		County Civil**	30,824
		<b>52,925</b>			<b>4,014</b>			<b>83,712</b>
6	Pinellas		8	Gilchrist		11	Miami-Dade	
	Adult Criminal	11,639		Adult Criminal	187		Adult Criminal	13,674
	Civil	7,489		Civil	75		Civil	36,231
	Family Court*	12,304		Family Court*	287		Family Court*	30,365
	Probate	7,449		Probate	70		Probate	12,431
	County Adult Criminal	32,218		County Adult Criminal	440		County Adult Criminal	65,974
	County Civil**	45,969		County Civil**	388		County Civil**	666,030
		<b>117,068</b>			<b>1,447</b>			<b>824,705</b>
7	Flagler		8	Levy		12	DeSoto	
	Adult Criminal	763		Adult Criminal	487		Adult Criminal	451
	Civil	701		Civil	254		Civil	145
	Family Court*	1,166		Family Court*	736		Family Court*	552
	Probate	618		Probate	198		Probate	153
	County Adult Criminal	3,497		County Adult Criminal	1,654		County Adult Criminal	668
	County Civil**	2,298		County Civil**	1,731		County Civil**	871
		<b>9,043</b>			<b>5,060</b>			<b>2,840</b>
7	Putnam		8	Union		12	Manatee	
	Adult Criminal	1,204		Adult Criminal	135		Adult Criminal	2,642
	Civil	445		Civil	75		Civil	1,894
	Family Court*	1,391		Family Court*	200		Family Court*	4,632
	Probate	402		Probate	84		Probate	2,156
	County Adult Criminal	2,972		County Adult Criminal	274		County Adult Criminal	8,696
	County Civil**	2,655		County Civil**	457		County Civil**	10,088
		<b>9,069</b>			<b>1,225</b>			<b>30,108</b>

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

<u>Circuit/County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>	<u>Circuit/County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>	<u>Circuit/County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>
12 Sarasota	Adult Criminal	3,254	15 Palm Beach	Adult Criminal	8,194	19 Okeechobee	Adult Criminal	612
	Civil	2,590		Civil	14,537		Civil	261
	Family Court*	3,891		Family Court*	13,936		Family Court*	791
	Probate	4,422		Probate	8,745		Probate	197
	County Adult Criminal	9,565		County Adult Criminal	50,257		County Adult Criminal	1,425
	County Civil**	22,321		County Civil**	137,344		County Civil**	1,450
		<b>46,043</b>			<b>233,013</b>			<b>4,736</b>
13 Hillsborough	Adult Criminal	12,543	16 Monroe	Adult Criminal	1,049	19 St. Lucie	Adult Criminal	2,386
	Civil	11,081		Civil	1,240		Civil	2,085
	Family Court*	22,719		Family Court*	1,122		Family Court*	3,653
	Probate	8,066		Probate	507		Probate	2,078
	County Adult Criminal	38,038		County Adult Criminal	3,038		County Adult Criminal	6,327
	County Civil**	111,281		County Civil**	10,059		County Civil**	16,168
		<b>203,728</b>			<b>17,015</b>			<b>32,697</b>
14 Bay	Adult Criminal	4,533	17 Broward	Adult Criminal	11,666	20 Charlotte	Adult Criminal	1,717
	Civil	1,161		Civil	25,285		Civil	1,073
	Family Court*	3,597		Family Court*	27,694		Family Court*	2,508
	Probate	1,078		Probate	9,742		Probate	2,139
	County Adult Criminal	11,542		County Adult Criminal	39,636		County Adult Criminal	4,919
	County Civil**	7,813		County Civil**	239,092		County Civil**	4,313
		<b>29,724</b>			<b>353,115</b>			<b>16,669</b>
14 Calhoun	Adult Criminal	296	18 Brevard	Adult Criminal	6,187	20 Collier	Adult Criminal	1,630
	Civil	62		Civil	3,870		Civil	2,793
	Family Court*	354		Family Court*	7,747		Family Court*	3,117
	Probate	104		Probate	3,387		Probate	2,225
	County Adult Criminal	214		County Adult Criminal	17,161		County Adult Criminal	7,892
	County Civil**	620		County Civil**	22,910		County Civil**	14,850
		<b>1,650</b>			<b>61,262</b>			<b>32,507</b>
14 Gulf	Adult Criminal	237	18 Seminole	Adult Criminal	3,043	20 Glades	Adult Criminal	145
	Civil	77		Civil	2,956		Civil	41
	Family Court*	189		Family Court*	5,283		Family Court*	120
	Probate	106		Probate	2,512		Probate	60
	County Adult Criminal	434		County Adult Criminal	11,188		County Adult Criminal	441
	County Civil**	187		County Civil**	38,673		County Civil**	1,701
		<b>1,230</b>			<b>63,655</b>			<b>2,508</b>
14 Holmes	Adult Criminal	601	19 Indian River	Adult Criminal	1,183	20 Hendry	Adult Criminal	607
	Civil	83		Civil	886		Civil	188
	Family Court*	402		Family Court*	1,710		Family Court*	636
	Probate	154		Probate	966		Probate	129
	County Adult Criminal	527		County Adult Criminal	3,577		County Adult Criminal	1,686
	County Civil**	616		County Civil**	5,632		County Civil**	1,849
		<b>2,383</b>			<b>13,954</b>			<b>5,095</b>
14 Jackson	Adult Criminal	740	19 Martin	Adult Criminal	1,269	20 Lee	Adult Criminal	4,255
	Civil	273		Civil	1,232		Civil	4,954
	Family Court*	751		Family Court*	1,614		Family Court*	10,087
	Probate	315		Probate	1,042		Probate	4,621
	County Adult Criminal	1,124		County Adult Criminal	5,376		County Adult Criminal	19,788
	County Civil**	2,570		County Civil**	7,254		County Civil**	35,484
		<b>5,773</b>			<b>17,787</b>			<b>79,189</b>
14 Washington	Adult Criminal	483						
	Civil	144						
	Family Court*	501						
	Probate	151						
	County Adult Criminal	610						
	County Civil**	736						
		<b>2,625</b>						

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

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# COURT CONTACTS FOR 2020

## FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

### Chief Justice CHARLES T. CANADY

Clerk John A. Tomasino (850) 488-0125  
Marshal Silvester Dawson (850) 488-8845  
State Courts Administrator Lisa H. Kiel (850) 922-5081  
Website <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org>

## DISTRICT COURTS OF APPEAL

### 1st DCA

Chief Judge STEPHANIE W. RAY (850) 717-8162  
Clerk Kristina Samuels (850) 488-6151  
Marshal Kevin Taylor (850) 717-8130  
Website <http://www.1dca.org/>

### 2nd DCA

Chief Judge NELLY N. KHOUZAM (850) 940-6050  
Clerk Mary Beth Kuenzel (850) 940-6060  
Marshal Jo Haynes (850) 940-6050  
Website <http://www.2dca.org>

### 3rd DCA

Chief Judge KEVIN EMAS (305) 229-3200  
Clerk Mercedes M. Prieto (305) 229-3200  
Marshal Veronica Antonoff (305) 229-3200  
Website <http://www.3dca.flcourts.org>

### 4th DCA

Chief Judge SPENCER D. LEVINE (561) 242-2000  
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) 947-1530  
Clerk Sandra Williams (386) 947-1530  
Marshal Charles Crawford (386) 947-1530  
Website <http://www.5dca.org/>

## CIRCUIT COURTS

### 1st Judicial Circuit

Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties  
Chief Judge JOHN L. MILLER (850) 595-4351  
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 MARK E. FEAGLE (386) 719-7546  
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) 255-1001  
Website <http://www.jud4.org/>

### 5th Judicial Circuit

Hernando, Citrus, Lake, Marion, and Sumter counties  
Chief Judge DANIEL B. MERRITT, JR. (352) 754-4480  
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) 239-7791  
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 DONALD A. MYERS, JR. (407) 836-0417  
Court Administrator Matthew Benefiel (407) 836-2051  
Website <http://www.ninthcircuit.org/>

### 10th Judicial Circuit

Hardee, Highlands, and Polk counties  
Chief Judge ELLEN S. MASTERS (863) 534-4669  
Court Administrator Nick Sudzina (863) 534-4686  
Website <http://www.jud10.flcourts.org/>

### 11th Judicial Circuit

Miami-Dade County  
Chief Judge BERTILA SOTO (305) 349-5720  
Court Administrator Sandra Lonergan (305) 349-7001  
Website <http://www.jud11.flcourts.org/>

# COURT CONTACTS FOR 2020

## 12th Judicial Circuit

DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties

**Chief Judge KIMBERLY C. BONNER** (941) 861-7950

Court Administrator Kimberly Miller (941) 861-7800

Website <http://www.jud12.flcourts.org>

## 13th Judicial Circuit

Hillsborough County

**Chief Judge RONALD N. FICARROTTA** (813) 272-5022

Court Administrator Gina Justice (813) 272-5894

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

## 14th Judicial Circuit

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

**Chief Judge CHRISTOPHER PATTERSON** (850) 914-6485

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) 831-7740

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

## 18th Judicial Circuit

Brevard and Seminole counties

**Chief Judge LISA DAVIDSON** (321) 617-7281

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 LAWRENCE M. MIRMAN** (772) 288-5560

Court Administrator Patty Harris (772) 807-4370

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

## 20th Judicial Circuit

Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties

**Chief Judge MICHAEL T. MCHUGH** (239) 533-2775

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

Website <http://www.ca.cjis20.org/>

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