

FLORIDA STATE COURTS



2012-2013

Annual Report

The Supreme Court of Florida

Annual Report, July 1, 2012—June 30, 2013



Ricky Polston
Chief Justice

Barbara J. Pariente
R. Fred Lewis
Peggy A. Quince
Charles T. Canady
Jorge Labarga
James E. C. Perry
Justices

Elisabeth H. Goodner
State Courts Administrator



Until 1978, this handsome, curved-glass window etched with the supreme court seal adorned Florida's first Supreme Court Building; the window is now permanently established in the Lawyer's Lounge of the current Supreme Court Building.

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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**, it 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 that reflect the community's diversity.

To be **effective**, it 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**, it will anticipate and respond to the needs of all members of society, and provide a variety of dispute resolution methods.

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

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

It's appropriate to begin this annual report on Florida's judicial branch of government with a word of thanks to you, its reader. No matter what your role – as a part of government, as a member of the public – your knowledge and understanding of the courts system is essential to the healthy functioning of our entire government. Our democracy and society alike require an effective court system. But the judiciary can carry out its constitutional role only if it has the support and trust of the citizens it serves – even though it must sometimes make difficult and unpopular decisions.

So, on behalf of all my colleagues at the Florida Supreme Court and throughout the entire state court system, I sincerely thank you for taking the time to explore this report.

Before I cite some of the specifics covered in this report, I will focus on two of the top issues for Florida's judiciary during the period from July 2012 through June 2013. These are budget matters and our technology transition.

Florida's economic growth has been in positive territory for three years in a row now. But funding remains a top concern for the judiciary. This branch of government does not have programs, it has people. In fact, 82 percent of our budget goes to pay salaries and benefits. So decisions made at the state level as to all state employees on pay and benefits have a dramatic effect on us.



Another aspect of the courts' budget to keep in context: It is a microscopic part of the entire state budget. In the 2012-13 fiscal year, which covers the 12 months from July 2012 through June 2013, the courts received \$443.9 million. That was 0.6 percent of the total state budget. This percentage is small in another sense – it's a slight drop from the 0.7 percent share the courts had been receiving for several years.

However, I am very happy to report that the courts did receive additional funding in the 2013 legislative session held in March and April, including a new roof for the Florida Supreme Court, to replace the original one that's been there since 1948. We appreciate the support from the Legislature and the governor for the funding we received.

We also appreciate additional resources we have received from the Legislature to deal with foreclosure activity, which remained daunting in 2012-13. Trial courts are still swimming in foreclosure cases but we have taken and will continue to take steps, with due regard to the rights of the parties, to move the cases with deliberate speed. We believe we are on pace to resolve the backlog within a three-year period.

In this annual report, you will find some details about the caseloads, the funding and the strategies we have put in place to handle the foreclosure challenge.

When it comes to technology, there is a lot to report for 2012-13. I will mention just a few highlights and, again, refer you to the details outlined in this report. To begin with, Florida has been working on automating the process for filing court documents for many years. It is a big project and one that must be handled properly because of the importance of all the cases that come to the courts every day.

A key milestone was reached on April 1, 2013, when lawyers in civil cases were required to file their documents electronically to any state trial court through the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal. More than 50,000 lawyers have registered to use the Portal and they have filed more than 7 million documents. These numbers reflect real progress toward a comprehensive electronic courts structure. But there is more to do. Judges must have the ability to work efficiently and effectively with the electronic documents that are being filed. We are making progress in that regard, despite significant challenges in funding the necessary technology.

Our technological transition can seem slow and I'm sure it's frustrating at times to those who view it up close. That seems consistent with most computer conversions people and institutions go through. But I think we in the courts system, together with the clerks' offices and the legal community, can be proud of the significant progress that has been made, especially when we look back to where we were a year ago.

Some of the other information you will find in this report includes the fundamentals about our branch, such as what kinds of courts Florida has established and what jurisdiction they have been given. You might be surprised to learn about how many cases and what kinds of cases are handled by Florida courts every day. I hope you also read about some of the initiatives that are a priority for the courts; they are designed to improve the administration of justice, enhance court access and services and deepen public trust and confidence.

I want to close this opening message by briefly mentioning Tom Hall, who served as Supreme Court clerk from the spring of 2000 through his retirement in the fall of 2013. He served both the Supreme Court and the entire branch extremely well and he will be missed.

Tom is an example of the importance of the men and women who work in Florida's judiciary. Although the most common image of a person who works for the courts system may be someone dressed in robes sitting on a bench, judges are assisted by other key personnel. Attorneys, case managers, trial court administrators, judicial assistants, interpreters, mediators, accountants, information systems analysts, facility maintenance engineers, auditors, security officers, librarians, web administrators, writers, personnel managers, clerks and deputy clerks – these are just some of the men and women who work hard to carry out the mission of Florida's courts: To protect rights and liberties, uphold and interpret the law, and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

No opening message to an annual report on our state courts system would be complete without mention of these people. As chief justice, it is my privilege to work with them and I thank them sincerely for all they do every day to make "justice" a reality for the parties who seek it in Florida.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andy Roth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Ricky Polston *Chief Justice*

Justice Polston was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in October 2008, and he advanced to chief justice on July 1, 2012. He is the court's fifty-fifth chief justice.

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.

Barbara J. Pariente *Justice*

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

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



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

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

R. Fred Lewis *Justice*

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

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



FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

While serving as chief justice, he founded Justice Teaching, an organization that pairs legal professionals with elementary, middle, and high schools in Florida to enhance civic and law-related education; currently, over 4,000 volunteer lawyers and judges are placed with and active in Florida's public and private schools. He also convened the first inter-branch mental health summit, which developed and proposed a comprehensive plan to address the increasing needs of those with mental illnesses who are involved in the criminal justice system. In addition, he established a task force to develop a survey with which to audit all court facilities in the state with the goal of identifying and removing obstacles that inhibit access to justice for people with disabilities.

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

Peggy A. Quince

Justice

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



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

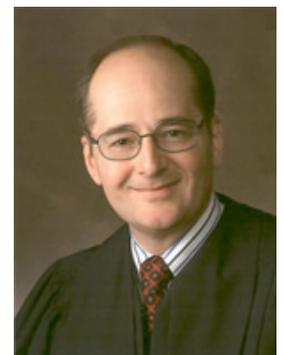
Justice Quince has been active in many civic and community organizations, including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Jack and Jill of America, the Urban League, the NAACP, and The Links, Inc. She has also received numerous awards, especially for her work on behalf of girls, women, minorities, civil rights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

Justice Quince and her husband, (retired) attorney Fred L. Buckine, have two daughters, Peggy LaVerne and Laura LaVerne.

Charles T. Canady

Justice

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



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

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

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Jorge Labarga

Justice

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

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.



James E.C. Perry

Justice

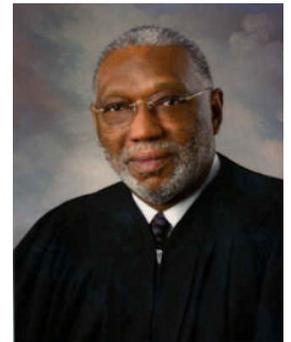
Justice Perry was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in March 2009.

Born in New Bern, North Carolina, Justice Perry received his BA in business administration and accounting in 1966 from Saint Augustine's College. Drafted into the Army soon after he graduated, he went to officer candidate school, got a commission, and was eventually promoted to first lieutenant.

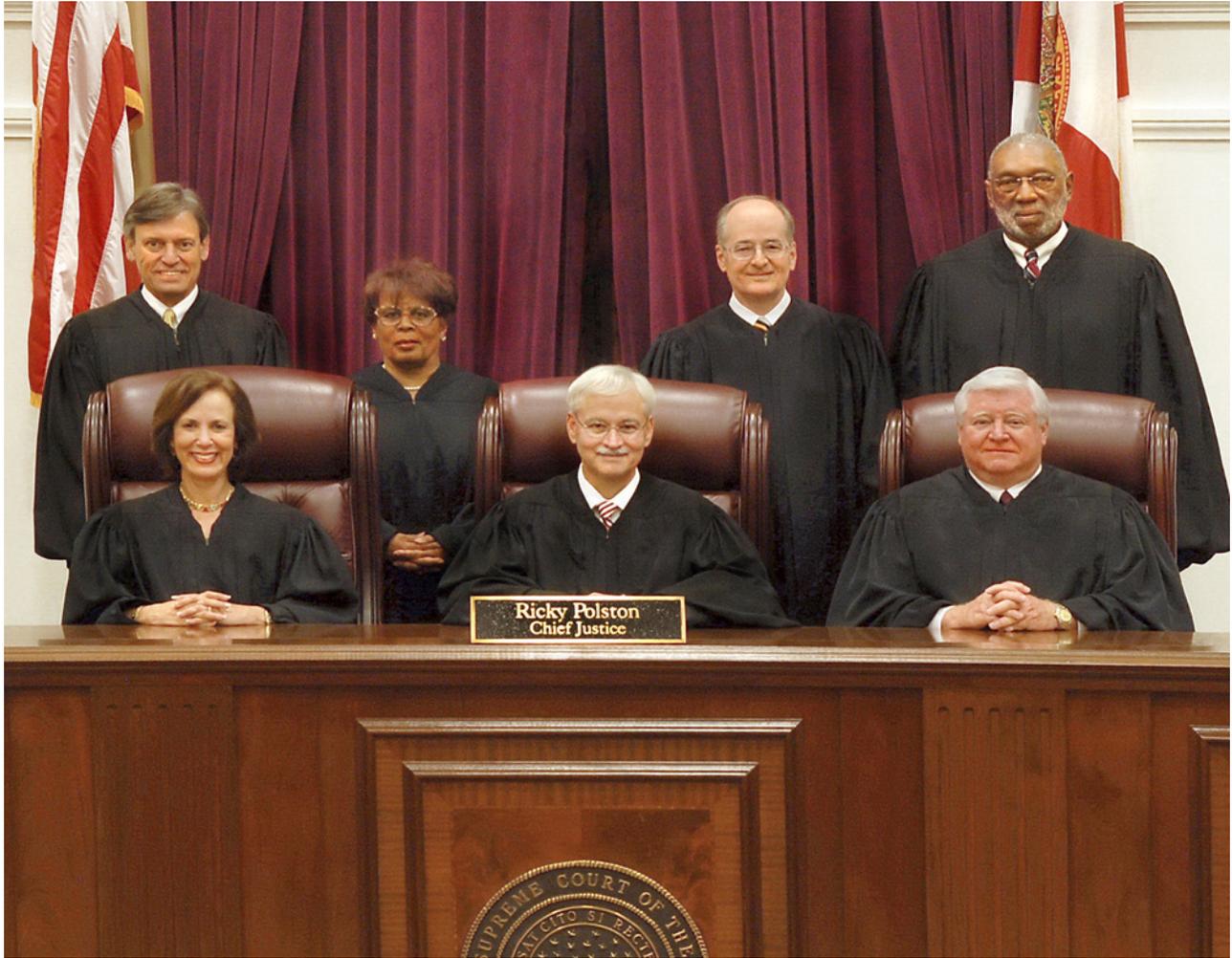
The assassination of Martin Luther King prompted his decision to go to law school: he felt that as a lawyer, he could do the most good. After earning his JD from Columbia University School of Law in 1972, he was determined "to go back to the South to fight for justice." He arrived in Florida in 1973 and has lived here ever since. He was in private practice, specializing in civil and business law, until his 2000 appointment to the circuit bench in the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit—the first African-American appointed to that circuit. For a two-year term (2003 – 05), he was chief judge of the circuit. He served there until his appointment to the Supreme Court.

Involved in many community and civic organizations, Justice Perry is especially committed to those that serve at-risk children, and he has received numerous awards and honors for his work on behalf of children, minorities, and social justice issues.

Justice Perry and his wife, Adrienne M. Perry, a retired professor in the Department of Education at Stetson University, have three children.



FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES



Florida Supreme Court Justices. Seated (l – r) are Justice Barbara J. Pariente, Chief Justice Ricky Polston, and Justice R. Fred Lewis; standing (l – r) are Justice Jorge Labarga, Justice Peggy A. Quince, Justice Charles T. Canady, and Justice James E.C. Perry.

July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013: The Year in Review

When, on June 27, 2012, the cusp of the new fiscal year, the gavel passed to Chief Justice Ricky Polston, the freshly sworn-in chief administrative officer of the judicial branch was unequivocal about the priorities of his two-year term. Budget concerns would continue to be foremost: “It will be most important to make sure the train is running and running on time. To do that, we need budget resources,” he emphasized. And, because it has the ability to significantly enhance the efficiency and accessibility of the courts, technology would also continue to be a major focus—in particular, issues associated with the implementation of electronic filing and with the automation of certain trial and appellate court processes and services.

During his remarks, Chief Justice Polston also shared his vision of his role as chief justice—which is “purely and simply to act as a steward of the people of Florida.” Responsible stewardship is “a bond of public trust that must flow both in and out of the courts of this state,” he explained, reminding listeners that, “Without this public trust, confidence in the courts inevitably would be diminished.” In keeping with this vision of his office, he added, “I am further committed that during my administration, the courts will be good stewards of the resources we’ve been given and of our mission to provide justice to all who seek redress.”

The 2012 – 2013 Florida State Courts Annual Report documents the ways in which the judicial branch has endeavored to be a good steward of its resources and to fulfill its mission. These endeavors are described within the context of the long-range issues of the Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch. The five long-range issues—which are the high-priority areas that the branch, in seeking to advance its mission and vision, must address over the long term—are Strengthening Governance and Independence; Improving the Administration of Justice; Supporting Competence and Quality; Enhancing Court Access and Services; and Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence.

[\(Take this link to the judicial branch’s 2009 – 2015 long-range plan.\)](#)

Long-Range Issue #1: Strengthening Governance and Independence

To fulfill its mission, the judicial branch must strengthen its ability to fully function as a coequal and independent branch of government, to govern itself with coherence and clarity of purpose, to manage and control its internal operations, and to be accountable to the people.

After six very trying years, Florida’s economy has begun to show signs of recovery; as a result, the court system has been experiencing greater revenue stability. Indeed, the judicial branch fared well during the 2013 legislative session: the budget for fiscal year 2013 – 14 addresses several of the branch’s most pressing funding needs—e.g., the foreclosure backlog, technology development and support, maintenance and repair of court facilities, and even salaries. Even though the economy is rallying, branch leaders remain mindful of the continuing need to ensure that the courts receive sufficient and stable funding and to improve the effective and efficient management of the branch.

State Courts System Funding

Until recently, the state courts system depended largely on general revenue funding to support court operations—which means that the court budget tended to reflect the state of the economy. When the economy was robust, sales tax and property revenues grew, so the state’s general revenue, and thus the court



Chief Justice Ricky Polston discusses court funding issues with judicial branch leaders.

budget, were healthy. Conversely, when the economy was sluggish, sales tax and property revenues dwindled, and the court system, like every entity that depended on state funding, suffered the effects.

The effects were particularly prominent between fiscal years 2007 – 08 and 2008 – 09, when the state’s general revenue fund, and thus the judicial branch’s budget, plunged dramatically: beginning at \$491 million, the court budget was reduced first to \$478 million, then to \$438 million, and finally settled at \$433 million—a 12% drop. Close to 300 staff positions were eliminated; a hiring freeze and travel freeze were instituted; education programs for judges were curtailed; and the work of numerous court committees was temporarily suspended. Just as court services were being reduced or cut, citizens and businesses began turning to the courts in greater numbers, as is common in times of economic uncertainty. Meanwhile, the number of backlogged cases grew, which had both direct and indirect economic impacts and further endangered Florida’s already precarious financial state. To maintain the timely administration of justice and to preserve the viability of the court system, branch leaders advocated the adoption of new budgeting practices to better stabilize the operations of the courts during times of economic crisis.



State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner talks with branch leaders about pay and benefits for state employees.

To protect the courts from further reductions in budget and personnel in the event that general revenue continued its decline, lawmakers, in a special session in January 2009, established a dedicated funding source for the courts—the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund—and funded it with higher filing fees and some fine revenues.

During regular session that spring, in response to the unprecedented rise in foreclosure filings, the legislature decided to fill the shortfall in the state budget by subsidizing the court trust fund with revenue generated by an increase in foreclosure filing fees. These fees became the principal source of revenue for the court trust fund, making the judicial branch budget vulnerable to volatility beyond its control. This inconstancy was especially pronounced when, beginning in October 2010, foreclosure filings, which had come to average more than 30,000 per month, fell to under 9,000 per month—largely resulting from the voluntary moratorium on foreclosures that the major mortgage lenders imposed, following the deluge of questionable paperwork submitted by the so-called “foreclosure mill” law firms. This precipitous drop in filings caused a significant shortfall in the court trust fund; as a consequence, trust fund revenue was insufficient to support the judicial branch’s appropriated budget, and the chief justice had to secure emergency funding from the governor and legislature.



Branch leaders and lawmakers agreed that this funding crisis had to be resolved—and that the court budget could not continue to be balanced on the back of the foreclosure crisis. The legislature asked the branch to recommend strategies for stabilizing court funding, and the chief justice established the Revenue Stabilization Workgroup, comprising judges and clerks of court, directing it to identify suitable, more reliable revenue streams for the court system’s and clerks’ trust funds. The workgroup determined that the courts and clerks of court typically generate funds that are more than sufficient to support court operations, but that a significant portion of these revenues is appropriated for non-court needs. They recommended that the current trust fund structure be maintained—but that the revenues generated by the courts and clerks be used to fund the legislatively-authorized budgets of the courts and clerks first—before being used to fund non-court-related purposes.

In spring 2012, the legislature opted for a different solution to address revenue stability for the courts. Because of its size, the general revenue fund can better withstand the mercurial nature of the foreclosure filing fees, lawmakers reasoned, so they decided to direct most of the mortgage foreclosure filings fees away from the court system's trust fund and into the state's general revenue fund and to return to using general revenue as the primary funding source for the courts. For fiscal year 2012 – 13, lawmakers appropriated \$443.9 million to the courts; this budget, which included no reductions from the prior year's budget, was 74% general revenue-funded. Said Justice Charles T. Canady, who was chief justice at the time, this restructuring of the branch's funding sources "is going to move us forward into a fiscal year where we will have less uncertainty." And State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner remarked that this solution "will address the cash flow problem for the short term." ([This link goes to the court system's Funding Justice pages.](#))

The spring 2013 legislative session, when lawmakers passed the budget for the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, was, by all accounts, a positive session for the judicial branch. Working with the first budget surplus in six years, lawmakers funded several critical court technology projects, including a rewrite of the Judicial Inquiry System as well as technical support for the Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution. From Florida's share of the national mortgage settlement, they directed \$21.3 million to the court system to address the foreclosure backlog (\$16 million for senior judges, general magistrates, and case managers and \$5.3 million for technology that will support their efforts). They provided funding to continue the post-adjudicatory drug court pilot project that was initially supported with federal grants, as well as funding for veterans treatment courts in five counties.

Lawmakers also addressed the branch's top priorities: its employees and its buildings. Funding was appropriated to repair several critical facility problems (the supreme court building will get a new roof, and the DCA courthouses will be able to take care of various maintenance and repair projects). Also included in the legislature's budget package was an across-the-board pay increase for state employees (the first since 2006). This increase applies to judges and justices as well—for whom the legislature also restored the 2% salary reduction that affected them in 2009. Altogether, the courts received \$443.4 million for the 2013 – 14 fiscal year—although it should be noted that this figure does not reflect the salary increases, the restoration of the 2% salary reduction for judges, or the \$21.3 million to address the foreclosure backlog.

Branch leaders concur that, with this budget, the court system is in a better position than it has been in recent years. Calling it "a rebuilding step," State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner, says that, overall, she is "guardedly optimistic." Acknowledging that "There are a number of pressures on the US economy that still could destabilize the recovery," she nonetheless believes there's reason for "hoping the worst is over."

The Judicial Management Council

Offering guidance to the supreme court for the last 60 years, Florida's judicial management councils have played an important role in the branch's governance structure. Although each council has had a distinct set of charges, they have shared the same underpinning responsibility: to make recommendations to the court about ways to improve the administration of justice. Membership numbers and breadth have varied in the different councils—the smallest, with 15 voting members and the largest, with 27—but each has included at least one supreme court justice, judges from each level of court, Florida Bar representation, and public members—the latter, to ensure that public opinion has a voice in the council's considerations.

The first council (called the Judicial Council of Florida) flourished from 1953 – 1980; the second, from 1985 – 1995; the third (renamed the Judicial Management Council), from 1995 – 2004; and the fourth, from 2006 – 2008. Achievements of these prior councils include the gathering of caseload statistics showing the work of the various courts from 1953 – 1978 (the year the Office of the State Courts Administrator took over this

responsibility); the drafting of an amendment to the Florida Constitution—adopted by the legislature and ratified by voters in 1956—that created the intermediate courts of appeal, defined the new jurisdiction of the supreme court, and authorized the chief justice to adopt uniform rules governing the practice and procedure in all the state courts; the development of the branch’s first long-range plan, released in 1998; and the establishment, in the late 1990s, of performance and accountability committees for the DCAs and the trial courts. In addition, over the years, the councils made recommendations concerning sundry judicial administration matters—e.g., alternative dispute processes, child support matters, court reporting services, funding structures for the court system, the development of time standards, the consolidation of the trial courts, the impeachment of judges, and the selection and termination of trial court administrators.



At the inaugural Judicial Management Council meeting, members talk about some trends and potential crisis situations that could affect the branch; listening to the discussion (r – l) are Lisa Goodner, state courts administrator; Justice Jorge Labarga; Chief Justice Ricky Polston; and Blan Teagle, deputy state courts administrator.

Standing on the sturdy shoulders of its predecessors is the branch’s fifth Judicial Management Council, established in 2012. Its reauthorization grew out of a recommendation of the Judicial Branch Governance Study Group, which was created in 2009 to offer the supreme court suggestions to “strengthen the governance and policy development structures of the branch, improve the effective and efficient management of the branch, and enhance communication within the branch.” In its report to the supreme court, the study group wrote that it envisions the re-animated Judicial Management Council as “a forward-looking advisory body to deftly assist the chief justice and supreme court in proactively identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and means to address them.” ([This link goes to information on the Judicial Branch Governance Study Group.](#))

Compared with its predecessors, the current Judicial Management Council has a more limited membership—only 15 voting members: two justices (including the chief justice, who chairs the body); three DCA judges; three circuit court judges; three county court judges; and four public members (two of whom are Florida Bar members). The state courts administrator serves on the council as well, as a non-voting member. With its lean membership, the council is designed to be a “nimble body” that can respond rapidly and dynamically to administrative issues the branch might be facing.



The Judicial Management Council has 15 voting members: two justices, three DCA judges, three circuit court judges, three county court judges, and four public members; the state courts administrator serves as a non-voting member. Pictured here are members Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA, and Judge Nina Ashenafi Richardson, Leon County.

The council’s responsibilities are also more tightly-focused than those of its predecessors. It has five charges: to identify potential crisis situations affecting the branch and develop strategies to address them; identify and evaluate information that may assist in improving the performance and effectiveness of the branch; develop and monitor progress relating to the branch’s long-range planning; review the charges of the court’s and The Florida Bar’s various commissions and committees with an eye toward coordinating, and, if need be, consolidating these bodies; and address any other issues the court brings to the council.

Most importantly, the supreme court conceptualized this council as “part of a loop that will assist the court with forward-looking vision.” At the council’s inaugural meeting in January 2013, Chief

Justice Polston accentuated the importance of this enterprise: evoking the image of “headlights,” he reminded council members that their primary objective is to shine a light on the trends and the potential issues and crises down the road and to help the branch prepare for and navigate the shoals. This opportunity to stand back and consider big-picture issues can be seen as a luxury in many ways. But with the state economy and court funding showing signs of steadying, and with no immediate or imminent court-related quandaries to attend to, the time is ripe for this kind of reflection and for the conversations it will engender.

Long-Range Issue #2: Improving the Administration of Justice

The judicial branch must remain committed to ongoing improvement in the administration of justice, including effective case processing policies and the efficient management of resources.

Preliminary data for fiscal year 2012 – 13 reveal that approximately 3.7 million complaints and petitions were filed in the state’s trial and appellate courts. During that same period, Florida’s courts disposed of approximately 4 million cases, utilizing a variety of dispute resolution methods—among them, diversion, mediation, plea, and adjudication by trial. These cases ranged from simple traffic citations to high-profile criminal proceedings and complex civil disputes with multiple parties.

Managing large caseloads, and administering the personnel and resources needed to support the work of the judges who handle these cases, are formidable tasks under any circumstances. However, over the last six years, when Florida was struggling through the global recession, the responsibility was, at times, daunting—and it continues to be a challenge, even as the state begins its slow recovery. Nonetheless, throughout these years of hardship for the state, its residents, and the institutions that serve them, the judicial branch continued building on its efforts to administer justice as efficiently as possible. During fiscal year 2012 – 13, these efforts included advances in the court system’s technology modernization projects, its performance and accountability measures, its court improvement initiatives, and its dispute resolution practices. The judicial branch also developed, received funding for, and has begun to implement a strategy for addressing the anomalous backlog of mortgage foreclosure cases pending in Florida’s courts.

Technology

Increasingly, Florida’s courts depend on information technology to support their day-to-day operations. Information technology now plays a fundamental role in most every area of court business—e.g., electronic filing, case management, document management and imaging, workflow management, digital court recording, remote court interpreting, and public internet access to court-related materials and information.

In fiscal year 2012 – 13, the branch made significant progress toward its goal of developing a comprehensive electronic courts structure. This ambitious objective includes the implementation of a statewide electronic filing solution (e-filing) for the trial and appellate courts; the integration of e-filing with other automated court processes; and other issues related to the court system’s migration toward a multifaceted digital environment. Through these and other technology modernization efforts, the judicial branch underscores its commitment to improving the efficiency of the court system and to enhancing access to the courts and court information.

Florida Courts Technology Commission

Established in 1995 under the direction of the supreme court, the Florida Courts Technology Commission (initially called the Court Technology Users Committee) 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 sets the technology policies and standards by which all court committees and workgroups must abide.

To address its extensive responsibilities, the commission is organized into more than a dozen committees, subcommittees, and workgroups, each assigned to a specific work area. During fiscal year 2012 – 13, the commission, along with many of its committees, continued to devote considerable time and attention to the myriad issues related to implementing statewide e-filing (the committees involved include the Appellate Courts Technology Committee, the e-Portal Subcommittee, the Technical Standards Subcommittee, the Trial Court Integrated Management Solutions Subcommittee, and the Funding Subcommittee).

As the commission takes on new tasks, it creates additional bodies to address them. Over the last fiscal year, for instance, the commission established a committee to develop a consistent statewide access model for access to electronic court data, to ensure that adopted standards are adhered to at the local level, and to review demonstrations of judicial viewers and certify vendors in compliance with established standards; another committee was formed to provide insight into the creation of an e-service application for clerks, public defenders, state attorneys, and local attorneys.

Chaired by Judge Lisa Taylor Munyon, Ninth Circuit, this commission facilitates the vast strides in technology that Florida’s judicial branch continues to make.



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

E-Filing

One of the fundamental components of a fully-realized electronic courts structure, e-filing refers to the electronic delivery of court records and supporting documents from lawyers and litigants to the clerks of court. E-filing also facilitates electronic access: lawyers are able to view and retrieve court documents for their cases from any computer with internet access. In addition to reducing costs for the courts and clerks, e-filing improves case processing and case management, and it also enhances attorneys’ and litigants’ courtroom experience and their access to the courts without significantly increasing their costs to use the courts.

Since 1979, when the supreme court adopted its first rules governing e-filing (for filing by fax), the branch has been working to automate the process for filing court documents. In 2008, lawmakers supported these efforts by mandating a transition to the electronic filing of court records and requesting that the supreme court set e-filing standards. The Florida Courts Technology Commission developed the standards—which included a conceptual model of an electronic filing portal through which court records could be transmitted securely to and from all Florida courts—and the court adopted the standards in 2009. Soon thereafter, the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers association reported that it had created a portal the branch could use. Together, the supreme court and clerks established the Florida Courts E-Filing Authority, the public entity that owns the portal and makes its business decisions, and the E-Filing Authority negotiated a development agreement with the clerks association, providing that the association would design, develop, implement, operate, upgrade, support, and maintain the portal in keeping with the e-filing standards.



At that point, the courts and clerks were able to turn their attention to the necessary technical matters, e.g., creating e-filing data envelopes for each of the 10 trial court divisions; developing an e-filing plan for each

division; and building an interface between each circuit court and the portal (work to connect the appellate courts to the portal would begin later). ([This link goes to information on e-filing in Florida's courts.](#))

In early January 2011, the portal went live, and, since October 1, 2013, more than 50,000 attorneys have been registered to use the portal (eventually, self-represented litigants will also be able to file documents through the portal). For the five civil divisions (circuit civil, county civil, probate, family, and juvenile dependency), all 67 counties can accept documents through the portal. And for the other five trial court divisions (circuit criminal, county criminal, criminal traffic, civil traffic, and juvenile delinquency), 62 counties can



accept documents through the portal. In addition, the supreme court and the Second DCA can now accept appellate e-filings through the portal. In an October 2012 opinion, the supreme court established a phased-in implementation schedule to expedite the transition from permissive to mandatory e-filing by attorneys. ([Take this link to the opinion.](#))

Between January 2011 (when electronic filing commenced through the portal) and October 1, 2013, more than 5.5 million filings and more than 9.3 million documents had been submitted through the portal. Indeed, clerks of court are reporting that filings are coming in daily, at every time of day and night. And the pace at which electronic documents are transmitted will increase as more counties are able to accept e-filings in more divisions. At the same time, 38 counties have been approved, in at least one court division, to discontinue the local requirement that attorneys also file a hard copy of the document(s) when filing electronically through the portal. Tom Hall, clerk of the supreme court and E-Filing Authority Board Member, acknowledged the "growing pains" that inevitably accompany such a hugely ambitious project, but he also noted that, "Technologically, Florida is on the forefront: it's unique for having a one-stop shop for e-filing at every level of the court system. No other state as big as Florida has successfully implemented a statewide system, and only a few others are trying, and they are very small states," he pointed out.

Appellate Courts Technology Pilots

E-filing is just one of numerous automated court processes that the judicial branch is implementing as it migrates to a comprehensive electronic courts structure. Therefore, while readying themselves for e-filing, Florida's appellate courts have trained their focus on this bigger picture, working to develop software applications that will enable the seamless integration of e-filing with other judicial processes like case management, document management, and workflow management. Since June 2010, the appellate courts have been advancing two pilot projects that are designed to facilitate this migration: the electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS) and iDCA/eDCA.

eFACTS, developed by OSCA's Information Systems Services Unit, is being piloted in the supreme court and the Second DCA. eFACTS is based in SharePoint, a Microsoft web application platform, and builds on SharePoint's capacity as an electronic document management and workflow system: eFACTS captures electronic as well as scanned documents, storing them in a secure environment; it facilitates the logical organization of the documents and automatically inputs the data into its case management system; and it enables users to locate, retrieve, and work on the documents they need, whenever they need them. Utilizing SharePoint's innovative collaboration tools, eFACTS also lets multiple users view and modify the same documents simultaneously, keeping track of the different versions created by different users. Other user efficiencies include electronic judicial voting, tracking of administrative matters, administrative and correspondence/red folder tracking, full-text searches, and calendaring. Users can also use their mobile devices to vote remotely, review



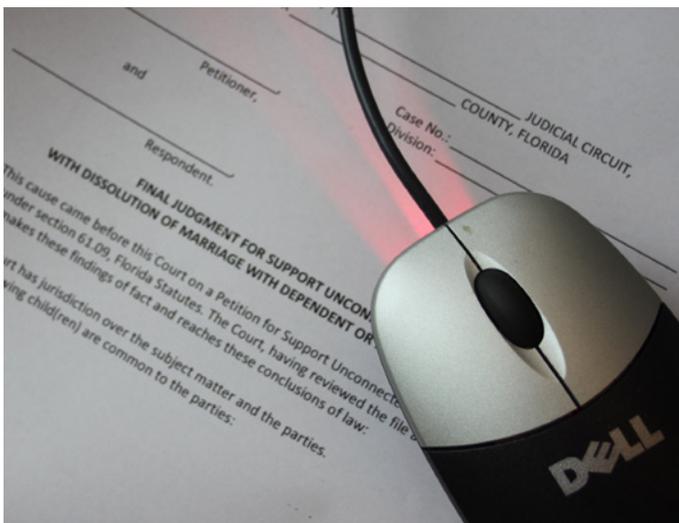
cases, and review documents easily and securely, at their convenience. In addition, eFACTS accommodates electronic filing via the portal.

eFACTS went into production for the supreme court in June 2012 and for the Second DCA in August 2013. Both courts are now using its electronic tasking and its electronic notifications features. The supreme court has been using electronic voting, and the Second DCA is working to implement it. Moreover, both courts are piloting automated redaction software that directly integrates with eFACTS and the SharePoint platform.

A critical component of eFACTS is its interface with the portal. Beginning in February 2013, attorneys had the option of e-filing documents to the supreme court through the portal; it became mandatory on April 1, 2013. And beginning in August 2013,

attorneys could voluntarily e-file through the portal to the Second DCA; it became mandatory on October 1, 2013. And, soon, both courts will be able to accept clerk-to-clerk transmittals via the portal. The Appellate Court Electronic Record (eRecord) standard, which addresses the transmission of records from all lower tribunals to the supreme court and the DCAs, was recently adopted, and lower tribunals will be required to meet the standard by June 30, 2014.

While fully embracing electronic access, the judicial branch persists in moving forward deliberately and responsibly, ever mindful of the need to ensure that ease of access in no way compromises people's right to privacy.



The other appellate courts technology pilot, called iDCA/eDCA, was initially developed by the First DCA for workers compensation cases. It is closely connected to the court's existing case management system and includes e-filing, document management, and tasking features designed for the appellate process. It comprises three closely linked sites: Internal DCA (iDCA), which is an internal component for document management for use by judges and law clerks; External DCA (eDCA), which is a portal for the transmittal of all filings with the court (and also includes access to public digitized documents for those listed as the attorney or party of record as well as e-service of court orders, opinions, etc.); and the Case Review System. Successfully deployed at the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth DCAs, iDCA/eDCA has played an

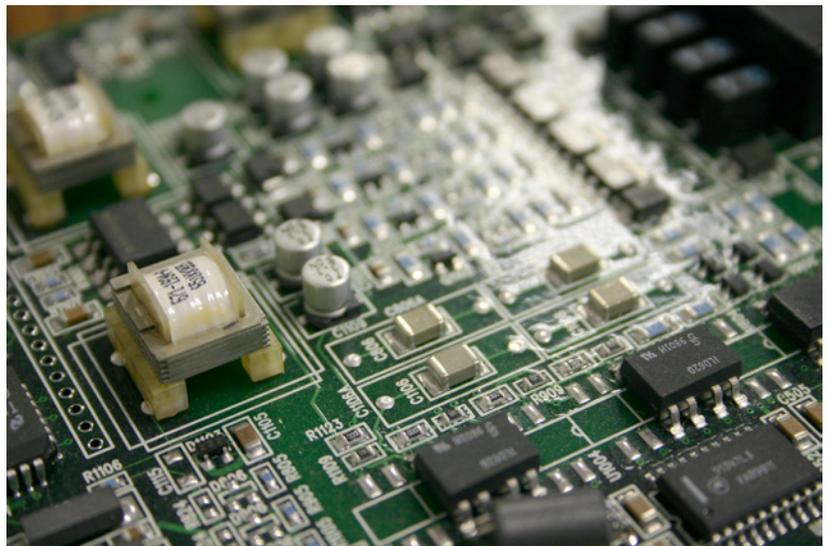
instrumental role in facilitating e-filing at the appellate level. However, eFACTS has several advantages over iDCA/eDCA: among them, eFACTS has the ability to associate a document to a docket item; it is built on a Microsoft platform, which allows for interaction among systems; it is web-based, allowing for remote access at will; it includes electronic voting and task handling, allowing for 24/7 access to and action on cases; it has automatic notifications as events occur in voting, tasking, and cases, giving justices, judges, and staff the ability to follow the progress of, and act on, a case at any time; and, most importantly, it integrates with the portal. But iDCA/eDCA will continue to address a pressing need until eFACTS is implemented statewide.

Electronic Access to the Courts

Although the term *e-filing* is generally used to refer to the electronic delivery of court records and supporting documents from lawyers and litigants to the clerks of court, it actually signifies the more far-reaching goal of

electronic access to the courts—that is, the use of information technologies to increase the accessibility of the courts. Electronic access comprises the myriad automated processes that make the courts more open to and reachable by all users—judges, court personnel, and clerks of court; attorneys and other parties; justice system partners; and the public. As it advances its implementation of statewide e-filing, the branch has kept its focus on this global objective of electronic access to the courts. In fiscal year 2012 – 13, to support its efforts to enhance court access, the branch focused on the following: implementing judicial viewers, rewriting the Judicial Inquiry System, developing e-Service and e-Warrants; and preparing the way for remote access to court records; in addition, the E-Filing Authority significantly expanded and redesigned its website, rendering it both more useful and more appealing.

Judicial Viewers. A judicial viewer is a web-based application that enables judges and court staff to work on cases from any location and across many devices. It provides judges with rapid and reliable access to case information; enables them to access and use case files and other data sources in the course of managing cases, scheduling and conducting hearings, adjudicating disputed issues, and recording and reporting judicial activity; and lets them prepare, electronically sign, file, and serve orders in the court. In the last two fiscal years, with a portion of Florida’s share of the national mortgage settlement funds, lawmakers directed \$8.9 million for technology to support judicial efforts to dispose of the backlog of mortgage foreclosure cases, and some of that funding is being used to purchase judicial viewers for the judges handling these cases. However, these new technology resources, while initially being used to expedite the processing of foreclosure cases, also have the potential to serve as the framework for a fully-automated trial court case management system. Thus the Florida Courts Technology Commission is working on an implementation strategy to employ judicial viewers in all Florida counties.



Judicial Inquiry System Rewrite. Developed by OSCA, the Judicial Inquiry System (JIS) is a technology initiative that enables the judiciary and other criminal justice entities, through a secure, single point of entry, to query 13 local, state, and federal sources regarding an arrestee’s criminal history background (sources include Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Corrections, Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, Florida Crime Information Center, and National Crime Information Center). JIS comprises three distinct applications: the JIS Search, through which users perform queries; the First Appearance Calendar, which provides automatic access to information essential for the appropriate treatment of the recently-arrested during their first appearing hearing; and the Active Warrant Alert Calendar System, which performs an automated query on defendants the night before they appear on the docket, generating, every day and for every judge, a calendar that provides a complete criminal history background for all individuals scheduled to appear in court. Because it significantly reduces the time required to secure search results, the JIS enables judges to make informed, time-sensitive decisions swiftly, thus enhancing public safety.

The JIS, which recently turned 10 years old, was beginning to exhibit several age-related problems, and the outdated software was also becoming hard to maintain. Consequently, during the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, OSCA began a two-year process of completely rewriting the JIS. The rewrite will have a new platform infrastructure (as a result, all of OSCA’s systems will be Microsoft-based). Moreover, with the rewrite, OSCA will own the underlying

source code, which means that OSCA will be able to distribute it, without restrictions, to the state courts, and will be able to modify it in house, easily and for free. The rewrite will be completed during the 2013 – 14 fiscal year.

e-Service. In the same opinion in which the supreme court established the implementation schedule for mandatory e-filing by attorneys, it also adopted amendments to the rules of court to require email of pleadings and documents between parties (because email service is quicker, more efficient, and less costly than paper mailing documents). For documents that are filed electronically through the portal, however, the FCTC propounded that the portal would be the best way to provide electronic service for documents. It created a workgroup to consider the electronic service needs of clerks and their employees, public defenders, state attorneys, and local attorneys and to provide insight into the creation of an e-service application. The application was implemented at the end of September 2013, and, now, when an attorney opens a case or files documents in a case through the portal, everyone on the service list for that case instantaneously receives a copy of the filings, with mechanical attestation of the date and time of service.

e-Warrants. Supported by the judicial branch, a law was passed during the 2013 legislative session that permits judges to review and sign warrants electronically. E-warrants simplify and expedite the process of securing and issuing warrants, thereby benefitting both the courts and law enforcement. In addition, by ensuring that warrants can be served in a timely manner, e-warrants also help to protect Florida's communities. The Twelfth Judicial Circuit worked with the Manatee County sheriff's office to implement an e-warrants system, which is currently being piloted. This system could readily be implemented in other counties, so other judicial circuits have been requesting to see a demonstration.

E-Filing Authority Website. The Florida Courts E-Filing Authority recently expanded and redesigned its website. In the past, the authority had two separate sites: one served as the entrance to the portal, and the second, which was hosted on the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers site, contained some basic information about the authority. Now, the two sites are merged, and users, in addition to being able to log on to the portal, can also access a wealth of e-filing-related resources—e.g., various training videos and manuals; information about the E-Filing Authority board, its members, and its committees; minutes from authority meetings; authority documents and reports; and FAQs. The authority also introduced a Twitter service to help lawyers get the most current information about e-filing changes. Explore the new site at <https://www.myflcourtagency.com/>

Remote Access to Court Records. Florida's state courts system has a long-standing commitment to providing remote access to court records in electronic form to the general public. The branch has directed considerable effort toward developing the infrastructure and policies necessary to support electronic access to court records, including the adoption of interim policies that permit access to docket information, final orders and judgments, and other specified documents—as long as no confidential information is released. ([This link goes to the 2007 administrative order, *In re: Revised Interim Policy on Electronic Release of Court Records.*](#)) While fully embracing electronic access, the judicial branch persists in moving forward deliberately and responsibly, ever mindful of the need to ensure that ease of access in no way compromises people's right to privacy.

Performance and Accountability

Established in the late 1990s, the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability propose policies and procedures on matters related to the deft and capable functioning of Florida's courts through developing comprehensive resource management, performance measurement, and accountability programs. The work of these commissions supports the branch's efforts to "utilize public resources effectively, efficiently, and in an accountable manner," one of the goals of long-range issue #2 of the strategic plan.

Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability

While the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability focuses on matters concerning the efficient and effective operation of Florida’s district courts, the DCA Budget Commission addresses matters related to budgeting and funding for the district courts. The work of the two commissions does overlap at times; for instance, when operations and performance matters are likely to impact the budget, or when funding issues are likely to affect operations and performance, the commissions provide input to one another. Typically, though, their work is largely separate. However, in July 2012, several members from each commission were appointed to participate in a joint workgroup to develop a resource allocation model for district staff resources. In working to bring equity across the DCAs, this joint effort of the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability and the DCA Budget Commission is also helping the districts work together as a system and is strengthening the collegiality among the district courts.



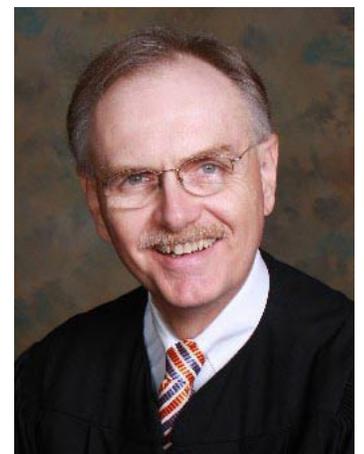
Judge William A. Van Nortwick, First DCA, chairs the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability.

The Joint Workgroup on Model Staffing Levels is chaired by First DCA Judge William Van Nortwick, who also chairs the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability. It was created to advance the work of an earlier budget commission workgroup that was directed to study and recommend ways to fairly apportion and efficiently manage the DCAs’ salary and benefit dollars (while allowing each court to retain as much autonomy and flexibility as possible). In its report, this antecedent workgroup offered recommendations designed to resolve the longstanding inequity in salary dollar allocations among the DCAs; to ensure that the courts are managing taxpayer dollars as efficiently as possible; to enable the DCAs to plan for and absorb significant budget events; and to boost the appellate courts’ efforts to engage in strategic planning. Following the release of the report, the budget commission created the Joint Workgroup on Model Staffing Levels to develop the recommendations for allocating district staff resources—i.e., central staff attorneys, law clerks, judicial assistants, clerk’s office personnel, and marshal’s office personnel.

For its first task, the joint workgroup focused on developing best practices for central staff attorneys, which it completed in December 2012. Now, the workgroup is exploring the possibility of establishing central staff case weights, which the budget commission would be able to use to help it determine the number of central staff attorneys each DCA needs to address its workload. The prospect of developing case weights for staff positions is unprecedented for the district courts: since 2006, the branch has made use of case weights to evaluate the need for new district court judges, but it has never before adopted case weights to determine the need for DCA staff positions. (Note: the branch has used case weights to assess the need for new trial court judges since 1999, and for new general magistrates and hearing officers since 2007.) Having case weights for DCA staff positions would be an invaluable tool both for the DCA Budget Commission and for the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability.

Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability

Trial court technology is one of three court elements (along with court security and trial court facilities) that continue to be supported by local rather than state funding. As a result, over the years, court data collection systems across the state have developed independently of one another, without any overarching principles or strategies. Currently, according to a Florida Courts Technology Commission estimate, over 1,300 systems abound across the state; most circuits and counties have



Chief Judge Terry D. Terrell, First Circuit, chairs the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability.

developed systems specific to their local needs for case management, document management, and scheduling case events, for instance, and other data systems have been developed by OSCA, professional associations (e.g., the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers), and outside vendors to address specific issues or serve particular constituencies within the greater court body. Years of discrete and uncoordinated system development have resulted in incompatible systems and inconsistent data collection at many levels of court administration. Since 2010, the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability, chaired by First Circuit Chief Judge Terry D. Terrell—in collaboration with the Florida Courts Technology Commission, the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court, and a range of project partners and subject matter experts—has been working to develop a solution to this unwieldy problem.

The remedy, called the Trial Court Integrated Case Management Solution, or TIMS, is a standardized, statewide, integrated data management solution that will be able to capture and report case and court activity information both at the circuit level and statewide. And while providing judges and staff with access to essential and uniform data to manage their caseloads and court operations, TIMS will also allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of court performance.

Given its ambitious scope, TIMS was conceived as a multi-year, three-phase initiative. The first phase involves identifying the information that needs to be accessed and tracked in TIMS—information essential to case processing and managing court resources. The second phase consists of determining the most feasible technological approach to creating the system. Phase three entails implementation planning.



During phase one, which began in summer 2011 and was recently completed, judges and other subject matter experts came together into divisional workgroups to identify key case and performance information and uniform data definitions. With that information, the commission built a court data model that includes standard definitions created to provide a single, uniform data “language” in which all jurisdictions can communicate relevant case and court information.

Since different data collection systems naturally gather and store information differently, the consolidation of that data is extraordinarily difficult—and is one of the greatest challenges to using and sharing data branch-wide. So the common language that the court data model provides is crucial, for it ensures that the circuits, regardless of the data collection system already in place, will be able to exchange court-related information.

In December 2012, the commission submitted *Trial Court Integrated Management Solution: Identifying Key Case and Workload Data and Establishing Uniform Definitions for Improving Automation of Florida’s Trial Courts* to the supreme court; the court approved the court data model and the commission’s other recommendations soon after.

The TIMS report and recommendations served as a launch pad for the very exciting integrated electronic case management initiative that is now underway. This initiative has two key elements. The first is judicial viewers, which comprise workstations and software that enable judges to review documents that are filed electronically and to manage their cases electronically (among their advantages, judicial viewers enable judges to view and search e-filed documents immediately; produce and disseminate orders electronically, with pre-population of key information; receive alerts when documents are ready for electronic signature; and reduce the massive flow

of paper files). The second element is a data management component that will pull court-activity data from multiple sources and integrate them into a coherent whole; generate reports on clearance rates, case inventory, and age of cases; and help the branch manage both its operations and its resources. Serving the entire branch, this electronic case management system is expected to result in better management of cases, better statewide-level court data reporting, and improved performance generally.

Court Improvement: Family Court

Some of the most complex, distressing, and private family matters—separation and divorce, child support, termination of parental rights, delinquency, dependency, family violence, child neglect and abuse, substance abuse, and mental illness—end up being adjudicated in the courts. Since launching its first family court initiative in 1988, the judicial branch has worked with its federal, statewide, and community partners to develop integrated, comprehensive approaches to handling these sensitive cases. Through its implementation of innovative practices and programs associated with family court, drug court, and veterans court, and through its efforts to address the underlying problems leading to the repeated incarceration of people with mental illnesses, the branch tries to resolve family-related disputes in a fair, timely, efficient, and cost-effective way. (Information about family court is below; to read about Florida’s drug courts, veterans courts, and mental health initiatives, see the following article, on problem-solving courts.)

Periodically, the Children’s Bureau (an arm of the US Department of Health and Human Services) evaluates the state agencies that serve the child welfare system to determine whether they are improving outcomes for the nation’s most vulnerable children. In 2008, Florida’s dependency system underwent this review, called the Child and Family Services Review. The review discovered a number of deficiencies that Florida is required to rectify—or risk jeopardizing the millions of federal dollars it receives to support its foster care system. The Florida Department of Children and Families is responsible for redressing most of the shortcomings identified during the review, but the court system, taking concurrent action, developed a work plan to improve dependency court. Soon thereafter, then Chief Justice Peggy A. Quince established a statewide, multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel to implement the work plan. Now chaired



Judge Katherine G. Essrig, Thirteenth Circuit, chairs the Dependency Court Improvement Panel.

by Judge Katherine G. Essrig, Thirteenth Circuit, and with support from OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement (OCI), the panel continues its efforts to improve courtroom practice and decision-making in dependency cases.

During the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, the Dependency Court Improvement Panel made steady progress with its statewide Model Courts Project, launched in January 2011

Through its implementation of innovative practices and programs associated with family court, drug court, and veterans court, and through its efforts to address the underlying problems leading to the repeated incarceration of people with mental illnesses, the branch tries to resolve family-related matters in a fair, timely, efficient, and cost-effective way.

to improve the stability, safety, and emotional well-being of children involved in Florida’s court system. Model court judges and magistrates strive to enhance dependency court practices by implementing the family-centered practices identified in the *2012 Dependency Benchbook* and by working to build strong community partnerships with child welfare stakeholders. ([This link goes to the *Dependency Benchbook*.](#)) OCI provides each circuit with

a “model courts liaison” to facilitate judicial networking and educational opportunities and to pursue national technical assistance resources for the judges and magistrates involved in the project. This was the first year in which all 20 judicial circuits participated in the Model Courts Project, and, altogether, 53 judges and magistrates are now involved.

One of the more recent focuses of the project is transition planning for children in the dependency system. When foster children are moved from one home to another without the benefit of sufficient transition planning, their lives are often disrupted, which can affect visitation with family members, educational progress, medical appointments, and the availability of services. Moreover, when children are moved without adequate notice, they frequently don’t have time to say goodbye to their caregivers and the other children in the home, which can be traumatic for everyone involved. During the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, the Department of Children and Families initiated efforts to improve the transition planning process, and the Dependency Court Improvement Panel began addressing the issue from the court perspective: each circuit now has a “judicial sponsor” who brings awareness of the issue to other judges, magistrates, court staff, and stakeholders and leads training efforts to improve the transition planning process.



At a recent Model Courts All-Sites Meeting, transition planning was also the subject of an engaging panel discussion that included a biological father, two foster parents, a caseworker, and a judge. More than 200 judges, magistrates, court personnel, and stakeholders, representing all 20 circuits, attended this meeting. All-sites meetings bring together all the model court participants in Florida, offering them an opportunity to discuss the challenges they have been facing and to share their successes.

In addition to stressing the need for adequate transition planning at the all-sites meeting, Judge Essrig also highlighted the new Model Courts Project goal of incorporating evidence-based parenting programs into the

services available to families statewide. Evidence-based practices derive from the best research evidence and clinical experience; they are scientifically evaluated and proven to produce positive results. One of the practices of evidence-based parenting programs, for instance, is the use of pre- and post-tests to evaluate participants’ parenting skills; these tests demonstrate whether, and how, a parent has improved—and they help a judge determine whether a child can be safely reunited with that parent. By using evidence-based practices for their parenting programs, the Model Courts Project resolves to adopt tested approaches to producing better outcomes for children.



Judge Katherine Essrig (on left) introduces attendees to a presentation on the Palm Beach County therapy dogs program at a recent Model Courts All-Sites Meeting. Next to her (l – r) are John Couch, OSCA senior court operations consultant; Magistrate Judette Fanelli, Fifteenth Circuit, and Susan Walker, a therapy dog handler who, along with her therapy dogs, volunteers several hours each week to work with children involved in the family court system.

Family court judges and court employees also benefitted from several other statewide opportunities to foster their professional development. For example, 2,000 attendees—including judges and court staff, child protection investigators, lawyers, service providers, and stakeholders—participated in the Thirteenth Annual Child Protection Summit, sponsored by the Department of Children and Families (attendees included 100 judges and

court personnel). Through mega-sessions, workshops, and break-outs conducted by state and national experts in child welfare, participants learned about best practices connected with child protection, safety, and well-being. Human trafficking, the quality parenting initiative, trauma-informed care, and legislative updates were among the focuses of this year's two-and-a-half-day program.

Finally, the Creating Our Future: One Family at a Time conference offered family court judges and staff another edifying, statewide educational opportunity. Altogether, 200 family law professionals attended and networked at the two-day conference, which was co-sponsored by the Florida Supreme Court Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court and the Florida Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. Funding from the Florida Court Education Trust Fund and a STOP Violence Against Women grant enabled each circuit to send a five-member team of judges and court staff (two members of each team were domestic violence judges/court staff). In her opening remarks, Justice Barbara J. Pariente, who chairs the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court, noted that this was "the first official family court conference co-sponsored by the court since the summer of 2006." Not long after, the global recession struck, and, since then, "Because of the loss of vital services, your jobs have become even more challenging." Even so, there's "good news," she stressed, for "In every circuit in Florida, progress has been made in incorporating promising practices and strategies into achieving the goals of Florida's family courts." She attributed this progress to the innovation, dedication, and collaboration of the attendees—the many family, court, and community professionals who strive to work together to resolve family disputes.



In addition to statewide trainings, family court judges and court personnel are often able to take advantage of regional or local educational opportunities. In the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, for example, nine circuits hosted trainings on family-time visitation, conducted by Judge Lynn Tepper, Sixth Circuit, and Dr. Mimi Graham, director of the Florida State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy. To their audiences of child welfare professionals (e.g., judges, magistrates, and members of the legal community), they emphasized the need to take into account both the law and the science of child development when determining visitation plans. Participants learned about the child-caregiver attachment process, early childhood developmental issues to consider in determining visitation, and promising practices that can improve the quality and frequency of visitation.

In addition to supporting trainings and other educational opportunities, the branch continues to expand its use of technology to make the dependency court process as efficient as possible. The Florida Dependency Court Information System, another feature of the Model Courts Project, provides judges, magistrates, and court employees with the information and resources they need to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of court events, thereby helping them meet federal and state mandates for dependency cases. A user-friendly, web-based case management system developed by OSCA's Office of Court Improvement (OCI), the system also allows users to run reports on various federal performance measures (e.g., child safety reports, achievement of permanency report, time to permanent placement reports), which help the branch gauge its progress in the discrete events in the dependency court process. The Florida Dependency Court Information System utilizes data exchanges from various sources (e.g., the Department of Children and Families, the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children, the Department of Juvenile Justice) both to eliminate duplicate data entry and to enrich the breadth and depth of dependency case knowledge. The system recently launched and is still undergoing modifications and improvements. ([For more information about the system, follow this link.](#))

To help judges, magistrates, court personnel, and interested stakeholders stay abreast of Florida's numerous dependency court resources and developments, OCI recently launched a new quarterly newsletter. The *Dependency Outlook* provides information about local and statewide dependency initiatives, promising practices, dependency court events, and training opportunities. ([For the *Dependency Outlook*, follow this link.](#))

In addition to its efforts to promote the efficacy and utility of dependency court, the branch has historically striven to improve the domestic violence process by enhancing participants' understanding of the injunction process, providing court staff with meaningful training opportunities, assisting in court efficiency, and increasing the safety of Floridians. Toward this end, OCI completed numerous domestic violence-related court projects and publications during the 2012 – 13 fiscal year. It produced *Get Psych'd about Batterer Compliance*, a video that discusses the recently-published *OCI Best Practices Guide for Enforcing Batterer Accountability* as well as some of the newer technologies that are being used to stalk victims of domestic violence. ([Take this link to the video.](#) And [access the best practices guide from this link.](#)) OCI also updated the *Domestic Violence Benchbook*: designed for judges who are on the domestic violence bench or who may be expected to review filed petitions for protection against domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, or repeat violence, the benchbook is a comprehensive resource guide that provides information about each step of the injunction process, along with flowcharts and checklists that offer at-a-glance information about the procedures judges must follow. ([This link goes to the Domestic Violence Benchbook.](#))

Furthermore, OCI staff created the *Stalking Violence Checklist*, a quick reference guide to the process for stalking violence injunctions, beginning with the petition and continuing through ordering and enforcing the final injunction. ([This link goes to the Stalking Violence Checklist.](#)) Staff also produced an *Elder Abuse Benchcard*. As the number of people over 65 in Florida is rising, so too are the incidents of domestic violence against elders; in addition to providing helpful information about domestic violence cases in which the abuser is a spouse or other intimate partner, this benchcard addresses domestic violence perpetrated on the elderly by family members (who are often, but not always, caretakers). ([Take this link to the Elder Abuse Benchcard.](#)) OCI also compiled a *Domestic Violence Resources* bibliography that provides links to publications on topics like Rural Community Issues, Children and Domestic Violence, Batterer Intervention Programs, Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities, and Custody Issues in the Domestic Violence Setting. ([Access the bibliography from this link.](#))

Finally, OCI continued its semi-annual production of the *Domestic Violence Review*, a newsletter that contains articles about domestic violence issues as well as information about upcoming events, conferences, and projects of interest. ([Take this link to the Domestic Violence Review.](#))

Court Improvement: Problem-Solving Courts and Initiatives

In Miami-Dade County in 1989, Eleventh Circuit Judge Herbert Klein, with approval from the Florida Supreme court and the aid of various state and local community leaders, pioneered the country's first drug court, catalyzing the national drug court movement. Before long, other kinds of problem-solving dockets using the drug court model began to abound—among them, mental health court, veterans court, domestic violence court, and truancy court. Problem-solving dockets like these are shaped to assist individuals who have specific needs and problems that are not being addressed, or cannot adequately be addressed, in traditional courts. These days, the US and its territories have more than 2,700 drug courts and more than 1,100 problem-solving courts. Although most problem-solving court models are relatively new, studies are already showing that this approach to differentiated case management—that is, the tailoring of the case management process to the requirements of specific case types—has a positive effect on the lives of the participants, their families, and their victims.

The predominant problem-solving courts in Florida are drug court, mental health court, and veterans court. The state's first drug court was an adult felony drug court—but the concept has expanded considerably since then: currently, Florida has 101 drug courts, including 52 adult (felony and misdemeanor), 24 juvenile, 21 dependency, and four DUI drug courts. In addition, the state has 19 mental health courts and 14 veterans courts in operation.

Drug Court

In Florida, drug court signifies a 12 to 18-month process during which nonviolent offenders whose crimes are related to substance abuse or addiction are placed into a treatment program under the close supervision of a judge and a team of treatment and justice system professionals. Each drug court is singular, reflecting the needs, priorities, and culture of its local community, but most drug courts share certain characteristics: they take a less adversarial approach than traditional criminal justice strategies; they require participants to maintain ongoing interaction with the court; they collaborate closely with community partners to offer a range of treatment and rehabilitation services; they require participants to undergo frequent and random alcohol and drug tests, and they closely monitor compliance, imposing appropriate sanctions if necessary; and they are devised to facilitate positive outcomes not only for the participants but also for their loved ones, their victims, and their communities.

Drug courts have been acclaimed for reducing recidivism, improving public safety, turning participants into productive citizens, reuniting families, and saving lives. They also have been shown to save taxpayer dollars.

In 2009, when the economy was in the throes of the recession and the prison population was still growing, efforts to save public money prompted legislative interest in expanding the number of post-adjudicatory drug courts in the state. Initially funded with \$18.6 million in federal stimulus dollars that the legislature appropriated to the court system over a three-year period, Florida's Adult Post-Adjudicatory Drug Court Expansion Program has eight participating counties: Broward, Escambia, Hillsborough, Marion, Orange, Pinellas, Polk, and Volusia. The program became fully operational in all eight counties in March 2010, and, since then, it has redirected a sizable population of nonviolent drug offenders from prison into effective treatment and diversion programs. Altogether, 2,380 offenders had been admitted into the program by September 30, 2013—and 815 had successfully completed it (since the treatment typically takes between 12 and 18 months to complete, the number of graduates will continue to rise).



Judge Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade County, chairs the supreme court's Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts.

The expansion drug courts have already saved the state millions of dollars. The Florida Department of Corrections estimates that the cost of housing a nonviolent offender in prison is currently \$49.24 per day—while expansion drug courts cost, on average, only \$20 per day. As of August 5, the expansion drug courts had spared the state more than \$22.3 million in prison costs alone. Moreover, because drug court graduates have lower rates of recidivism than former prisoners, the state can expect to see additional long-term cost savings.

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Justice Peggy A. Quince is the justice liaison for the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts.

The program recently entered its fourth year. The federal grant expired on June 30, 2013, and the state is providing continued funding of the program for the 2013 – 14 fiscal year.

To receive funding, participating drug courts have had to comply with numerous state and federal reporting requirements involving the collection of a broad range of client-level data (e.g., arrest, offense, and sentencing information; demographics; progress in treatment; drug test results; and incentives and sanctions). After creating a provisional, web-based system to collect the data, OSCA staff began to search for a comprehensive, off-the-shelf case management system that could be customized to collect the required data efficiently and securely. In 2011, OSCA contracted with a vendor to adapt its system to the branch’s particular drug court needs.

Initially responsible for collecting data for the eight expansion drug courts, the Florida Drug Court Case Management System is gradually being expanded for use with other drug court program types. This secure, web-based system streamlines data collection and entry, helping drug court coordinators and case managers to manage their caseloads and monitor program outcomes. It also provides instant, client-level and program-level reports, custom staffing reports and dockets, customizable drug test panels, and bulk tasks for quickly entering routine data. In addition to supporting the courts at the local level, the system provides uniform and comparable data that can be used to inform the supreme court’s policy and budget decisions. The system is also designed to provide the tools needed to perform local and statewide evaluations, which will provide the branch with a reliable measure of the effectiveness and efficiency of drug court.

Branch leaders recognize that the only way to assess and authenticate the true effectiveness of drug court is through a statewide evaluation, which can gauge the success of the program as well as reinforce the call for dedicated state funding to support and expand operations. Several years back, with technical assistance from the National Center for State Courts, OSCA developed a plan for evaluating drug courts across the state, and with a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, OSCA selected a research organization to advance the project. The first phase, which began in March 2011, consisted of an online assessment of all of Florida’s adult felony drug courts to determine which ones best implement the 10 key components of drug court and drug court best practices. Based on that information, five adult drug courts were selected for a comprehensive evaluation that included a process, outcome, impact, and cost effectiveness analysis.



Recently completed, the evaluation reflects an accurate, statewide picture of how the drug court programs are operating. In addition, it documents the effectiveness of drug court versus traditional sentencing options for people with drug and/or alcohol addictions who enter the criminal justice system; it also identifies elements of drug court that are related to successful outcomes and makes recommendations about where to expand drug

courts to include more offenders in need of services. Finally, the information it discloses supports branch efforts to secure future drug court funding.

The evaluation corroborates the years of anecdotal evidence extolling the benefits of drug court. Indeed, Florida's judicial and executive branch leaders have long commended Florida's drug court program. In recognition of May 2013 as National Drug Court Month, for instance, both the supreme court proclamation, signed by Chief Justice Ricky Polston, and the state of Florida resolution, signed by Governor Rick Scott and the cabinet, hail "the significant contributions drug courts have made, and continue to make, in reducing drug usage and crime in Florida and throughout the nation."

In addition to encouraging their city and county commissions to adopt proclamations honoring National Drug Court Month—and drug court's twenty-fourth anniversary—numerous drug courts throughout the state participated in Drug Courts Make a Difference Day, a statewide initiative that showcased the positive impact drug courts have on Florida's communities. Together, drug court teams and drug court participants volunteered at their local food banks, sponsored food drives, built homes with Habitat for Humanity, worked at local homeless shelter bargain stores, and devoted time and energy to other local charities, both to raise awareness of drug court and to underscore their commitment to giving back to their community.

Mental Health Initiatives

Mental health diversion programs, mental health dockets, and mental health courts grew out of circumstances similar to those that spurred the development of drug courts: repeat offenders in need of treatment services. As community resources for people with serious mental illnesses began shrinking in response to the economic crisis, the courts began seeing more repeat offenders with untreated mental illnesses. Florida's jails and prisons are not designed, equipped, or funded to accommodate these offenders. However, the drug court model offers a

viable alternative. Like drug courts, mental health courts hold offenders accountable while connecting them to the treatment services they need to address their mental health issues. Monitoring and treating them in a mental health court is more effective, more efficient, and less costly than the remedies available through traditional justice system approaches.

Miami-Dade County Judge Steven Leifman, who chairs the supreme court's Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts, continues to advocate for the passage of bills that will support the expansion of community-based diversion and re-entry initiatives—an approach that, in addition to saving taxpayer dollars, will also significantly redirect the state's financial priorities from the incarceration of nonviolent offenders to their rehabilitation.

In addition to advocating the establishment of mental health dockets across the state, Miami-Dade County Judge Steven Leifman, who chairs the supreme court's Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts,

has also been promoting the development of safe, effective, and cost-efficient alternative placement options for people adjudicated incompetent to proceed or not guilty by reason of insanity.

Judge Leifman emphasizes that Florida's current forensic treatment system does not prevent individuals from becoming involved in the justice system; moreover, once someone has become involved in the justice system,

this treatment regimen does not reduce recidivism in jails, prisons, and state hospitals. Moreover, the current system is costly: it costs approximately \$625 million annually (or \$1.7 million per day) to house people with mental illnesses in Florida's prisons and forensic treatment facilities—and an additional \$365 million each year (or \$1 million per day) to house people with mental illnesses in local jails. These expenditures are forecast to increase by as much as a billion dollars each year over the next decade.

Instead of continuing to funnel taxpayer dollars into a “broken system,” Judge Leifman has been championing a fundamental redesign of public service systems to provide more effective, less costly treatment and prevention in the community. Key to this redesign is a decrease in the demand for some of the most costly services provided in state forensic hospital settings. This decrease would come from the establishment of pilot programs around the state that divert certain individuals—specifically, those who are charged with less serious offenses and who do not pose public safety risks—from placement in state forensic facilities to placement in locked, community-based competency restoration and community reintegration services.

His advocacy led to the creation, in August 2009, of a 10-bed, community-based forensic commitment program called the Miami-Dade Forensic Alternative Center—a legislature-funded collaborative effort between the Eleventh Judicial Circuit and the Department of Children and Families. Recently expanded to 16 beds, this facility serves individuals who meet certain criteria: they have been charged with less serious offenses; do not have significant histories of violence or violent offenses; and are not likely to face additional incarceration if convicted of their alleged offenses. Participants are initially placed in a locked inpatient setting where they receive crisis stabilization and short-term residential treatment services. When they are ready to step down to less restrictive community placement and outpatient services, they are given assistance with re-entry and are provided with ongoing support services. Another feature of this model of competency restoration is that, unlike state facilities, this program keeps *in the program*—rather than in jail—those individuals who are awaiting trial once their competency has been restored; as a result, these individuals are less likely to lose their ability to maintain normal psychological functioning and be declared incompetent to proceed again.

Thus far, 79 people have been diverted into the Miami-Dade Forensic Alternative Center from placement in state forensic treatment facilities. These participants are identified as ready for discharge an average of 52 days sooner than individuals who are admitted to forensic facilities, and they spend an average of 31 fewer days under forensic commitment. And those who remain linked to the center's services demonstrate 68 percent fewer jail bookings and 94 percent fewer jail days following discharge than do those who are no longer linked to these services. In addition, the costs of funding services in the center is nearly 20 percent less than the average cost for services provided in forensic treatment facilities. To date, the program has been funded to provide nearly 14,000 bed days of services—and will cost nearly \$900,000 less than forensic treatment facilities for the same number of bed days.

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Veterans Court

More than 22 million veterans live in the US, and, according to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, Florida is home to more than 1.5 million veterans, the third largest population in the country. Veterans frequently return home with physical injuries. But war can have a profound psychological effect as well: in addition to depression, veterans often suffer from two “signature injuries” of war, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder—all risk factors for substance abuse. Moreover, when some veterans return home, they find it

difficult to re-assimilate into their communities—and veterans with untreated substance abuse or mental health issues may find it even harder to return to their home lives. These challenges can sometimes lead to criminal activity.

Founded in 2008 in Buffalo, NY, veterans court utilizes the drug court model. And, like drug court and mental health court, veterans court holds offenders answerable for their offenses while linking them with treatment services that address the complex needs associated with substance abuse, mental illness, and concerns unique to the traumatic experience of war. Unlike drug court and mental health court, however, veterans court relies heavily on the use of mentors—other veterans in the community who volunteer to support defendants with one-on-one time and attention. In addition, veterans courts leverage resources from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to serve these offenders' treatment needs.

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Veterans dockets have several goals: they seek to identify, as early as possible, those veterans who are suffering from neurological and psychological injuries; to introduce these veterans to an ongoing process of recovery designed to help them become stable, employed, and substance-free while continuing mental health care through community/peer counseling groups or the VA; to reduce their contacts with the criminal justice system; and to reduce costs associated with criminal case processing and re-arrest.

Florida's first veterans docket launched in 2010, and by fiscal year 2012 – 13, eleven were operational. These dockets are already showing great promise, and lawmakers have

been encouraging courts to develop more special dockets and diversion programs for local veterans. To support their efforts, during the 2013 legislative session, the legislature appropriated funds to implement three additional veterans courts and to enhance two of the existing ones.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

To process cases more effectively, efficiently, and opportunistically, the long-range plan recommends that the judicial branch “continue to explore and implement effective alternative dispute resolution processes.” Mediation and other alternative dispute resolution methods assist in improving the administration of justice by promoting communication between parties, thereby expediting problem-solving; by conserving judicial time; and by helping the branch use public resources responsibly.

Initially driven by grassroots, community-based efforts, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in Florida has its origins in Miami-Dade's first citizen dispute settlement center, established in 1975. ADR was brought under

the auspices of Florida's court system in 1988, and, since then, the judicial branch has developed the most comprehensive court-connected mediation program in the country.

Lending support to this effort were then Chief Justice Joseph Boyd and Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte, former dean of the FSU College of Law, who, in 1986, established the Florida Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) as the first statewide center for ADR education, training, and research. The DRC, which is housed in the supreme court building, sponsors an annual conference, giving mediators and arbitrators regular opportunities to enhance their professional competence; conducts county mediation training for volunteers; assists the local courts throughout the state, as needed; and provides staff assistance to four supreme court mediation boards and committees (the Supreme Court Committee on ADR Rules and Policy, the Mediator Ethics Advisory Committee, a mediator grievance board, and a grievance board for certified mediation training programs). The DRC also certifies mediators and mediation training programs in five areas: county, family, circuit, dependency, and appellate. Currently, more than 6,200 supreme court-certified mediators serve the state and its citizens.



More than 1,000 people attended the Dispute Resolution Center's twenty-first annual statewide conference; pictured here (l-r) are keynote presenter George Knox, attorney, arbitrator, and Florida Supreme Court certified circuit court mediator; Janice Fleischer, chief of the Florida Dispute Resolution Center; Chief Justice Ricky Polston; and Judge William H. Overton, Pinellas County, who accepted the Sharon Press Excellence in Alternative Dispute Resolution Award that was posthumously bestowed upon his father, Justice Ben F. Overton.

The preeminent continuing mediation education event of the 2012 – 13 fiscal year was the DRC's twentieth annual statewide conference. The conference theme, *Twenty and in Transition*, emblemized this special anniversary, and in her welcoming remarks, DRC Chief Janice Fleischer shared her reflections on the metamorphoses that both the DRC and dispute resolution generally have undergone since the DRC's first statewide conference. Her musings offer a useful framework for discussing some of Florida's recent ADR-related achievements.

People who were present at any of the DRC's earliest conferences would immediately point out that the size of the conference has expanded dramatically over the years. Only a few hundred people attended the DRC's first conference; these days, given the growing number of supreme court-certified mediators, conference planners prepare for at least 1,000 participants (the August 2012 conference drew nearly 1,000 people, and at the August 2013 program, conferees surpassed the 1,000 mark). As the conference increases in size, so does the scope of ADR—and the number of areas in which mediators are expected to have proficiency. To address the broadening educational needs of mediators, the 2012 and the 2013 conferences offered sessions on topics like women in prison, legal issues of the LGBT community, non-traditional families, domestic violence in same-sex relationships, dispute boards, e-filing basics, and new resolution processes like parenting coordination and early neutral evaluation.

Another significant change is the DRC's growing use of technology to streamline its processes and to assist mediators, trainers, attorneys, and the public. To help it become as paperless as possible, for instance, the center has embarked on an Efficiency and Automation Project. As a result, email is now the standard method of communicating with mediators and committee members, and the center's various forms—mediator renewal forms, continuing mediator education forms, grievance forms—are now available online. In addition, the DRC



A recent, four-day county mediation training program in Pensacola drew 26 participants; included in this photo are two of the Dispute Resolution Center staff trainers: Kimberly Kosch and Stephanie McHardy.

recently automated the mediator renewal process. Thanks to new technologies, continuing mediation education resources have also become more readily available: mediators seeking additional education hours can, at their convenience and from the comfort of their homes or offices, download audio recordings of conference workshops. By automating these processes, the DRC endeavors to become even more efficient, accessible, and “green” (an added benefit is that automation saves staff time and eliminates printing and postage costs).

The DRC also continues to expand its web presence; its website now includes a page with Mediation Information for Legal Professionals as well as a For Trainers Only page (which has links to forms, information about trainer qualifications, and documents relating to continuing mediation education).

Another notable change in the ADR field, though one that the DRC would like to see reversed, is the rise in grievances against mediators. “Grievances are up and are more egregious than in the past,” Ms Fleischer remarked: in the last three years, they have risen from just a few each year to more than 20 grievances and more than 80 good moral character cases each year. While acknowledging that these increases are, in part, a “natural byproduct of the growth of the field of mediation and the number of mediations conducted each year” (approximately 125,000 court-connected mediations per year in Florida), she also emphasized that this trend cannot be ignored.

To address this concern, the DRC is taking a two-pronged approach. First, it is working to educate mediators and to protect consumers by more widely publicizing the imposition of sanctions. In addition to sending notices of sanctions to all circuits and to publishing sanctions in professional media—which the DRC has been doing for awhile already—it has also begun to publish sanctions online, making the results of the disciplinary proceedings easily accessible: on its Disciplinary Proceedings and Sanctions page, the DRC now offers information on mediators for whom sanctions were imposed by a panel or sanctions resulted from consensual agreement. The DRC is currently working to add summaries of grievance dismissals to the site: what causes consumers to grieve (regardless of the outcome) and what does not lead to a sanction are as important as knowing who was sanctioned, the DRC reasons; it sees grievance dismissal information as another useful educational tool for mediators.

The second prong involves efforts to support mediators, and, to do this, the DRC has been offering as much mediation education as possible; through these trainings, the DRC instructs mediators about their ethical obligations—to help them recognize and avoid the sorts of pitfalls that can lead to grievances. In fiscal year 2012 – 13, for instance, the DRC offered five advanced mediation education programs, all of which focused exclusively on mediator ethics. In addition, the DRC conducted three certified county mediation trainings; these four-day programs include a two-hour ethics component and also interweave ethics education into almost every item on the agenda.

Even with these many consequential changes that ADR and the DRC have been facing, one feature has remained constant: it's what Justice Charles Canady, in his 2012 welcome address at the 2012 conference, touched on when he praised the “very valuable” role that mediators play in resolving disputes: when mediators help parties “work through their differences and reach an agreement,” he emphasized, “they do a great service to the parties and to the system of justice.” ([Follow this link for more information about the DRC.](#))



Local elementary school children who are studying conflict resolution skills in school commemorate Mediation Week with a visit to the supreme court.

Mortgage Foreclosure Initiative

Although the housing market is showing signs of recovery, the ramifications of the mortgage foreclosure crisis persist in plaguing borrowers, lenders, communities, and economies across the nation. This is particularly true in Florida, which continues to post one of the country's highest foreclosure rates, as reported by RealtyTrac. Typically, foreclosure filings in the state average 70,000 per year, but at the height of the foreclosure crisis, filings leaped to 400,000 cases in one year. To complicate matters, because new cases were being filed more quickly than the courts could resolve them, a substantial backlog developed.

With support from the legislature, the trial courts have settled more than one million foreclosure cases in the last five years. Even so, the number of pending and anticipated foreclosure filings remains considerable: as of September 30, 2013, approximately 285,747 foreclosure cases were pending in Florida's courts, and an estimated 680,000 additional foreclosure cases are expected to be filed by 2016. ([For more information about mortgage foreclosure cases in Florida, follow this link.](#))

In 2012 – 13, additional funds became available to address the foreclosure predicament: specifically, in early 2012, Florida was awarded \$8.4 billion from the national foreclosure settlement funds, giving the legislature more resources with which to try to mitigate the crisis. From the portion of the funds meted out before the 2013 legislative session, lawmakers gave the court system \$4.9 million for senior judge days, temporary case management staff, and enhanced technology.

The remaining settlement funds were appropriated during the 2013 session. Before session began, lawmakers asked the judicial branch to develop and submit a proposal for funding necessary to reduce the foreclosure backlog. In response, Trial Court Budget Commission Chair Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, established the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup and gave it three tasks: identify the barriers that currently exist in foreclosure case resolution; propose strategies to improve the foreclosure process; and develop a supplemental budget request for workforce and technology resources. In April 2013, the budget commission submitted the workgroup's final report and recommendations, *Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan for the State Courts System*, to the supreme court, which approved it and presented it to the legislature. ([Take this link to the report.](#))

Building upon strategies successfully carried out at the local level, the Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan recommended three main solutions to the problems associated with the just and timely processing of foreclosure cases. These solutions have since been implemented, significantly supporting branch efforts to process these cases “effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner”—the first goal of Long-Range Issue #2.

The first solution is to make use of more active judicial or quasi-judicial case management and adjudication, including authorizing general magistrates to process foreclosure cases, thereby expanding their use in the civil division. Judges still have oversight over these cases, but general magistrates serve as a dedicated resource to help ensure that each case receives the attention it needs. Also part of this solution is the development, by each chief judge, of a case management plan that optimizes the circuit's utilization of existing and additional resources in the resolution of foreclosure cases. The object of these case management plans is to ensure the full participation of the parties, avoid unreasonable delays, and identify for disposition those cases that have been pending for the longest period of time.

For its second solution, the Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan calls for additional case management personnel to enable focused attention on older foreclosure cases. To support efforts to ensure that these cases are resolved in a fair and timely manner, the plan advocates a one-to-one ratio of judges/general magistrates to case managers. The clerks of the circuit courts assist in this effort by providing the courts with foreclosure case-related data needed to compute specific performance indicators approved by the supreme court (e.g., time to disposition, age of pending cases, and clearance rate). With these indicators, the judicial branch is gauging the efficiency with which it is using public resources.



Twentieth Circuit Judge Margaret Steinbeck, who chairs the Trial Court Budget Commission, established the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup, which produced the Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan for the State Courts System.

And the third solution is the deployment of technology resources to help judges move cases forward. Specifically, the plan calls for the implementation of a judicial viewer in each circuit. A judicial viewer is a web-based application that allows judges and court staff to work on cases from any location and across many devices. Judicial viewers provide judges with rapid and reliable access to case information; enable them to access and use information electronically in the courtroom; let them prepare, electronically sign, file, and serve orders in the court; and generate case management reports that help judges manage these cases efficiently. ([This link goes to the administrative order regarding the implementation of the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup's recommendations.](#))

During the 2013 legislative session, based on the Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan and drawing from the national foreclosure settlement funds, lawmakers appropriated \$21.3 million in non-recurring funds to the courts: \$16 million for senior judges, general magistrates, and case managers who focus exclusively on the backlogged cases, and \$5.3 million for technology enhancements. (In addition, they apportioned \$9.7 million to the clerks of court to assist with these backlogged cases.) All told, the request for technology enhancements was fully funded, and the request for judicial and case management resources received partial funding.



Kris Slayden, the manager of OSCA's Resource Planning and Support Services Unit, provided staff support to Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup.

On the same day it released its administrative order on the Final Report and Recommendations of the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup, the supreme court also released an order directing the Trial Court Budget Commission and OSCA's Court Education Section to develop and present training and education for the judges, general magistrates, and case managers involved in the foreclosure process. The first training was held in early August: the 2013 Foreclosure Initiative Training Program was designed for judges, general magistrates, and case managers and included a half-day training on foreclosure basics and new legislation and a half-day training on best practices, case management, and evidence. Also included was a day-long training exclusively for all new general magistrates who were hired for this initiative.

A few months later, the Tenth Circuit hosted an interactive workshop on Foreclosure Case Management for case managers and support staff across the state. The workshop offered new strategies for reducing the size of the backlog and the age of pending foreclosure cases; made recommendations for building more effective case management by creating synergy within the case management team; and shared innovative case management tools and techniques.

The trainings were devised to ensure that judges, general magistrates, case managers, and support staff have the essential information and skills to fulfill their duties with regard to implementation of the mortgage foreclosure initiative—thereby making the best possible use both of the money appropriated by the legislature and of judicial time and resources. ([To view the administrative order on the foreclosure initiative training, take this link.](#))

Through its Foreclosure Initiative, the judicial branch underscores its commitment to “resolving foreclosure cases expeditiously while still protecting the due process rights of the litigants,” emphasized Kristine Slayden, manager of OSCA's Resource Planning and Support Services Unit and staff support to the Trial Court Budget Commission. Interestingly, however, while considering strategies for developing a more effective and comprehensive way of handling these cases, the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup discovered some methods for improving the administration of justice, she noted. Specifically, expanding the use of general magistrates and adopting an

active case management approach (which has typically only been used in the family division in Florida) “chart new territory for the civil division.” Moreover, the judicial viewer, while initially being used to facilitate the processing of foreclosure cases, is also serving as “the framework for a completely automated trial court case management system”—something the judicial branch has sought for at least 10 years. So, in meeting the mortgage foreclosure challenge, the judicial branch has embraced improvements to the processes it uses to accomplish its constitutional mission. As Ms Slayden explained, “While looking for ways to address the crisis of the foreclosure backlog, we uncovered ways to move the courts statewide into a whole new age of handling cases.”



The Tenth Circuit recently hosted a state-wide, interactive workshop on Foreclosure Case Management for case managers and support staff; here, Trial Court Administrator Nick Sudzina welcomes attendees to the program.

Long-Range Issue #3: Supporting Competence and Quality

The Florida State Courts System is committed to having a workforce that is highly qualified and dedicated to service.

To meet the demands of justice in the twenty-first century, judicial officers and court staff must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to administer the justice system fairly, effectively, and in ways that promote trust and confidence. As Long-Range Issue #3 emphasizes, “Advanced levels of training and development are critical to enable those who work within the system to effectively perform the challenging work of the courts and meet the demands placed on them.”

Education for Judges and Court Personnel

Throughout the year, various groups within the court system offer high-quality education and training opportunities to the men and women who work in the judicial branch. Making efficient and effective use of limited funding and staff resources, these groups employ a host of educational tools, media, and styles to reach their intended audiences. For instance, the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity—with the help of the

26 Diversity Teams (one in each circuit and appellate court) and the judges who have become certified diversity trainers—conduct local and regional diversity awareness trainings. Also on the local level, judges and court personnel frequently hold trainings for members of their workforce: for example, many circuits have begun to present continuing education programs for their court interpreters.

Several OSCA units also offer, or organize, education initiatives for judges, court personnel, and justice system partners across the state. The Office of Court Improvement, for example, is always expanding its library of live and online trainings, publications, and videos for family court and problem-solving court professionals. And the Florida Dispute Resolution Center, in addition to presenting local mediation education programs, orchestrates a statewide conference each year, giving mediators a chance to earn continuing education credits in mediator ethics, cultural diversity, domestic violence education, and other topics of importance to their practice. Also, OSCA’s Court Services Unit gives regular orientation workshops, and administers written and oral language exams, for foreign language and sign language interpreters who seek certification to interpret for the courts. And the Administrative Services Division and the Personnel Services Unit periodically organize statewide instructional events on topics of relevance to court staff who work in budget services, finance and accounting, general services, and human resources. Readers can learn more about these offerings elsewhere in this annual report.

This section of the report, however, focuses on the education programs and resources supported by the Florida Court Education Council (FCEC), which was established by the supreme court in 1978 to coordinate and oversee the creation and maintenance of a comprehensive education program for judges and some court personnel groups and to manage the budget that sustains these ventures. Chaired by Justice Jorge Labarga and vice-chaired by Judge Mark Shames, Sixth Circuit, the council, with the support of two OSCA units (Court Education and Publications) provides continuing education through live programs, both statewide and local, and through distance learning events, publications, and other self-learning resources.

Education for Judges

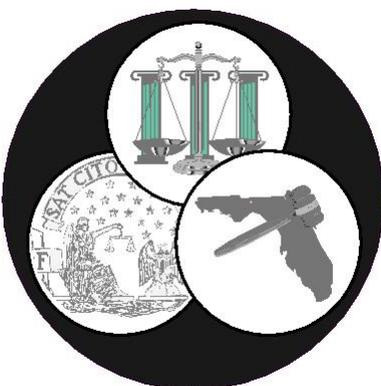
Judges are required to earn a minimum of 30 approved credit hours of continuing judicial education every three years, and new judges have to satisfy additional requirements. Each year, the council works with the leaders of the judicial conferences and the judicial colleges to help judges meet their educational obligations.

Florida’s judicial branch has three judicial conferences: the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida, the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges, and the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges. One of the functions of these conferences is to make sure their respective judges are able to

satisfy the continuing education mandate. Through representation on the council, each conference helps to develop educational policy; and with the assistance of OSCA’s Court Education Section, each conference also coordinates its own live education programs. Although budgetary constraints continue to curtail some of the live programs, the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida and the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges were able to offer their annual education programs in summer 2012. And the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges held its annual education program in fall 2012; at the same time and place, the appellate clerks and marshals held their annual education events.



Justice Jorge Labarga chairs the Florida Court Education Council.



In addition to the three conferences, the branch has two colleges: the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies and the Florida Judicial College. The College of Advanced Judicial Studies is a comprehensive continuing judicial education program that includes courses for judges seeking to sharpen existing skills as well as courses that encourage thoughtful reflection on the meaning of justice. Altogether, the 2013 program had 325 attendees; also present, at their own expense, were four German judges who came as observers. At the same time and venue, the chief judges and trial court administrators held their biennial education program.



At a course on Crime and Punishment at the 2013 Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, Judge Terry P. Lewis, Second Circuit, leads a discussion on Sentencing Decisions.

Participation in the Florida Judicial College is required for trial court judges who are new to the bench—and, beginning in 2013, for all new general magistrates and child support enforcement hearing officers as well. This intensive, 10-day program unfolds in two phases. The first phase, a pre-bench program typically held in January, explores the art and science of judging through a series of orientation sessions, a mock trial experience, and a trial skills workshop; this year’s program drew 85 judges and 12 general magistrates/child support enforcement hearing officers. The second phase, two months later, focuses on more substantive and procedural matters; attending this phase were 79 new judges and 16 general magistrates/child support enforcement hearing officers. In addition, 57 judges who were preparing to rotate to a new division attended the three-day “Fundamentals” portion of phase two.



Judge Nina Ashenafi Richardson, Leon County, considers sentencing hypotheticals with participants of the Crime and Punishment course offered at the 2013 Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies.

The FCEC also sponsors an education program for judges new to the appellate bench: the New Appellate Judges Program was held last spring. New appellate judges who have never sat on the trial bench must also attend the first phase of the Florida Judicial College.

In order to be able to offer the hundreds of hours of continuing judicial education instruction needed each year, court education leaders rely substantially on the time and dedication of a slate of judges who generously agree to serve as faculty. Judges who want to teach other judges are required to take a faculty training course that, in a small-group setting (typically no more than 16 participants), introduces them to adult education principles and teaches them how to create participatory learning activities. In these day-and-a-half-long programs, which are offered at least once a year, judges learn how to do a needs assessment, create learning objectives, team teach,



Senior judges from the Florida Panhandle participate in a Senior Judge Education Pilot Program in the supreme court building; the program included a full day of diversity training and a half day on Florida law updates.

training and a half day on Florida law updates. Attendees deemed the program very useful, and the FCEC hopes to offer it again. Senior judges are an important judicial resource—and that is especially true in times of budget austerity; currently, they are playing a critical role in helping the branch address the formidable foreclosure backlog. Florida closed out the fiscal 2012 – 13 year with 194 active senior judges, and that number continues to rise.

Other FCEC-sponsored programs for judges included a DUI Traffic Adjudication Lab and a series of National Judicial College webcasts on an array of legal topics.

Education for Court Personnel

Long-Range Issue #3 emphasizes that, like judges, court personnel should “have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve and perform at the highest professional levels.” To meet this goal, the FCEC, through its Florida Court Personnel Committee and with the support of OSCA’s Court Education Section, continues to develop education and training opportunities for the employees who work in Florida’s court system.

Efforts to build a flourishing education program for court personnel began in 2006, when the FCEC hired a consultant to perform an education needs assessment of six categories of court personnel and to make recommendations about their training needs and the most effective methods for addressing them. Not long after, the council established the Florida Court Personnel Committee, chaired by Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit, to construct a plan for meeting these educational needs. For the last five years, the FCEC has provided funding for numerous

reach different kinds of learners, and plan a successful course. They also have a chance to work with some of the court system’s most experienced and accomplished judicial faculty, who share practical and anecdotal tips about what works well (and what is likely to disappoint). These training programs ensure that the FCEC’s education initiatives remain needs-based, student-driven, and beneficial and that the faculty are skilled at meaningfully responding to the needs of the learners. In the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, the FCEC sponsored two faculty training programs for judges.

The FCEC also gave 18 senior judges from the Florida Panhandle an opportunity to participate in a Senior Judge Education Pilot Program, consisting of a full day of diversity



Rose Patterson, chief of OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement and one of the instructors for the Faculty Training track of the 2013 Florida Court Personnel Institute, leads a discussion on preparing course structure and content.

statewide educational initiatives for court personnel groups, and it has also granted funding assistance to support local education programs developed by court personnel.

In fiscal year 2012 – 13, the council funded five statewide programs. The Judicial Assistants Association of Florida and the Florida Trial Court Staff Attorneys Association received funding for their annual conferences. A Basic Grants Skills course was also subsidized. And funding was provided for a two-day education program for the court system’s ADA coordinators. Finally, with FCEC funding, the Tenth Circuit hosted a statewide Spanish Language Skill Builder workshop for court interpreters. The FCEC also awarded support to seven circuits for local training programs on topics like ethics, communicating in the workplace, leadership essentials, and dealing with difficult people.



Fifteenth Circuit Judge Kathleen Kroll, who chairs the Florida Court Personnel Committee, addresses conferees at the plenary session of the 2013 Florida Court Personnel Institute.

In addition, for the second year, the FCEC sponsored the Florida Court Personnel Institute, a day-and-a-half-long program tailored specifically to the education needs of Florida’s court employees. This year, 125 court personnel participated, taking one of four educational tracks: Advanced Leadership; Introduction to Court Interpersonal Skills (with a focus on communication, efficiency, and ethics); Applied Ethics and Professional Conduct in the Court Workplace; and Faculty Training. This year, the program also had a plenary session—which proved to be a rousing, energizing experience that gave employees in parallel positions from across the state an opportunity to brainstorm and problem-solve together. Feedback on the institute was so enthusiastic that the FCEC has already begun to plan for a 2014 Florida Court Personnel Institute.

Publications and Other Self-Learning Resources

To supplement the spectrum of training and educational offerings for judges and court personnel, Long-Range Issue #3 recommends that the branch continue to broaden its repository of self-learning resources and web-based materials. To help the court system achieve this goal, the FCEC supports judicial and staff efforts to develop new court education publications, update existing ones, and augment the online Court Education Resource Library.

The FCEC’s Publications Committee, with the assistance of OSCA’s Publications Unit, worked vigorously to add to and to update its catalog of online publications. New publications include *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* and, in collaboration with OSCA’s Personnel Services Unit, the *2013 Employee Manual* (the latter, though prepared for OSCA staff, was designed to serve as a template for circuits and DCAs that are looking to create their own employee manual).



In addition, the Publications Committee recently updated the following publications: *An Aid to Understanding Canon 7*; the *Contempt Benchguide*; the *Criminal Benchguide for Circuit Judges*; the *Florida Judges’ Guide*

to *Resources for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services*; the *Judicial Ethics Benchguide*; the *Pandemic Influenza Benchguide*; and the *Topical Index of the Opinions of the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee*. Moreover, on a quarterly basis, the committee continued to produce its cumulative and indexed *Domestic Violence Case Law Summaries* and its *Traffic-Related Appellate Opinion Summaries*. Also updated was the *Fundamentals for Family Court Judges*, a web-based education program satisfying the supreme court requirement that judges who are new to the family division, as well as judges who haven't served in the division in two years, take a course in family fundamentals before assuming the assignment or within 60 days after assuming the assignment.

Finally, the Court Education Resource Library continues to grow. The resource library provides browsers with easy access to a panoply of educational materials: links to publications and other materials prepared by the Publications Committee and various OSCA units; materials from live court education programs and other educational events; and useful articles, curricula, handbooks, and reports from other state and national organizations. The committee recently reorganized the information in the resource library, making it easier to navigate and find the resources one is seeking: now, resources are classified by area of law or subject. The committee also launched an electronic subscription service intended to readily connect judges and court personnel with the specific online resources in which they have an interest.

For the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, the Publications Committee, in addition to updating numerous benchguides and other publications, also aims to develop two distance learning projects for court personnel.

Long-Range Issue #4: Enhancing Court Access and Services

Florida's judicial branch is committed to improving access to courts, and to providing the highest quality of services to everyone who enters a courthouse.

The following reflection introduces Issue #4 of the long-range plan: "Public access to the courts is a cornerstone of our justice system. Article I, section 21 of the Constitution of the State of Florida requires that 'the courts shall be open to every person for redress of any injury, and justice shall be administered without sale, denial or delay.' Inherent in this mandate is the precept that our courts are neutral bodies that will interpret the law fairly, and will ensure equal treatment of all parties."

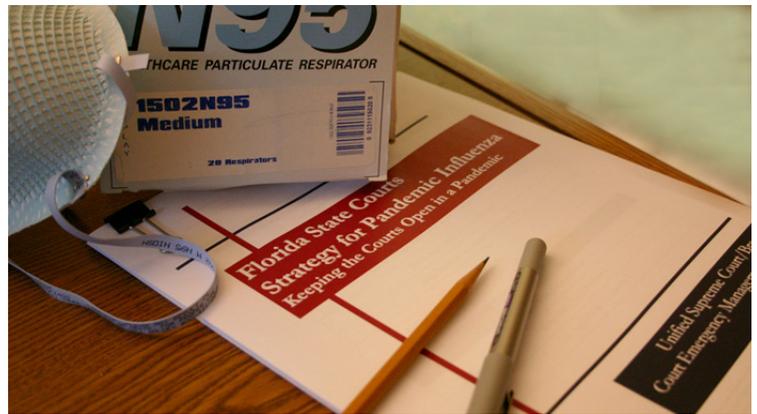
In the paragraph that follows, however, the plan acknowledges that "There are obstacles that litigants face...in seeking access to the courts." Among the impediments to which the long-range plan calls attention are cultural and attitudinal biases, language and communication barriers, and physical and electronic hurdles.

The judicial branch is committed to actively identifying and mitigating these obstacles. Through its endeavors to promote diversity awareness, to expand the pool of qualified court interpreters, and to facilitate architectural and electronic access for people with disabilities—and through its steps to keep the courthouse doors open, even in emergencies—the judicial branch aspires to provide all people with meaningful access to Florida's courts and to treat all people fairly and respectfully.

Emergency Preparedness

For court access to be a reality, the courthouse doors must be open, and the courts must be operational. Court access is, in effect, denied, and justice is delayed when courts have to close because of an emergency of any kind, whether that emergency results from a natural event or has a human source.

The tragedy of 9/11 set in motion the development of branch-wide policies and procedures for anticipating and managing emergencies that can disrupt court operations. Within a few months of the terrorist attacks, then Chief Justice Charles Wells established the Work Group on Emergency Preparedness and directed it to “develop a plan for the State Courts System to better respond to emergency situations.” Two policy goals guided the workgroup: protect the health and safety of everyone inside the courts and keep the courts open to ensure justice for the people.



Since then, each Florida court has identified its mission-essential functions; each has a preparedness plan that includes emergency and administrative procedures as well as a continuity of operations plan; and each has designated an emergency coordinating officer, a court emergency management team (which is responsible for maintaining court operations in a disaster situation), and a public information officer (who helps to coordinate emergency response activities and provides information to, and answers questions from, the media and the public). At the same time, the branch founded the Unified Supreme Court/Branch Court Emergency Management Group, which recommends policy for, prepares for, and responds to emergencies both in the supreme court building and in courts across the state. In addition, the branch established lines of communication with executive branch agencies and with local and statewide emergency management and first responder agencies to expedite responses to threats and emergencies as well as to foster the coordination of resources. The emergency preparedness measures that Florida’s court system has instituted since 9/11 have been nationally recognized as a model of teamwork and intergovernmental collaboration.

Emergency management signifies being prepared both for nature-made crises (tropical storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, pandemics, etc.) and for human-made cataclysms (oil spills, biohazards, extended information systems outages, military or terrorist attack-related incidents, and the like).



The Unified Supreme Court/Branch Court Emergency Management Group recommends policy for, prepares for, and responds to emergencies both in the supreme court building and in courts across the state.

Typically, the emergencies that assail Florida tend to be weather-connected (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration identifies the Sunshine State as the most hurricane-prone state in the nation; historically, 40 percent of the hurricanes that have struck the US hit Florida). At the tail end of the prior fiscal year and into the early few months of the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, Tropical Storm Debby and then Tropical Storm Isaac forced the closure of two DCAs and of trial courts in 12 circuits across the state. Not since the calamitous hurricane seasons of 2004 and 2005 have so many courts in Florida had to close (this time, though, the courts were closed no more than two or three days, in most cases); some also had to activate their continuity of operations plan.

Court emergency management team members recognize that the continuity of operations plan is a living document, and they regard occasions like these as opportunities to review their plan and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that their court is as prepared as possible to respond to emergencies, recover from them, and mitigate against their impacts. To support the efforts of the court teams, the Unified Supreme Court/Branch Court Emergency Management Group, which recently updated and thoroughly revised the supreme court/OSCA continuity of operations plan and the Pandemic Staffing Guide, is now working to coordinate a statewide training for representatives of each court emergency management team; in the meantime, it continues to encourage all courts to conduct local trainings, participate in table-top exercises that test their local emergency preparedness plans, and engage in drills (e.g., fire, emergency evacuation, and shelter in place drills) several times a year.

The court system is diligent about updating and improving its emergency preparedness measures and remains mindful of the lessons learned from Florida’s earlier hurricane disasters: continue to improve the branch-wide emergency plan; sustain on-the-ground leadership before, during, and after an emergency; ensure a reliable means of communication when power is lost, telephone services are discontinued, and cell phone service is either down or unreliable; and work collaboratively with all stakeholders. Even in these days of relative tranquility and clement weather, the branch continues its efforts to prepare Florida’s courts to respond deliberately to any crisis.

Fairness and Diversity Awareness

The judicial branch seeks to create an environment free of bias—a setting in which judges, court personnel, attorneys, and litigants treat each other with courtesy, dignity, and impartiality. One of the goals of Long-Range Issue #4—“Florida’s courts will treat all people fairly and with respect”—embodies this aspiration.

For the last few decades, the supreme court has been actively working to realize this vision with the help of several diversity committees, including the Gender Bias Study Commission (1987), the Racial and Ethnic Bias Study Commission (1989), the Committee on the Court-Related Needs of Elders and Persons with Disabilities (early 1990s), and the Commission on Fairness (1997). Most recently, in 2004, the court established the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity “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.” For its first four years, the standing committee was chaired by Judge Gill Freeman, of the Eleventh Circuit; since then, it has been chaired by Judge Scott Bernstein, also of the Eleventh Circuit.



Judge Scott Bernstein, Eleventh Circuit, chairs the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity.

Since its inception, the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity has created an online court diversity information resource center; produced a report on *Promoting and Ensuring the Diversity of Judicial Staff*

Attorneys and Law Clerks, whose recommendations it continues to implement; coordinated an extensive outreach project on perceptions of fairness in Florida's courts and prepared a comprehensive report based on the findings; supported the provision of local diversity and sensitivity awareness programs for judges and court staff; established 26 diversity teams (one in each circuit court and DCA and one in the supreme court/OSCA) to advance court-wide education programs as well as outreach and public education efforts; coordinated the development of a courts-specific survey instrument for evaluating all state court facilities to determine their accessibility to people with disabilities; propelled the development of local initiatives to fortify court-community relationships; produced practical educational materials to help judges, court staff, and attorneys recognize, respond to, and understand their role in eliminating bias from the courtroom; and worked with the Florida Court Education Council to identify and recommend resources for implementing fairness and diversity training for judges and court personnel at the local and state levels.

Since 2006, one of the standing committee's predominant tasks has been to ensure that diversity awareness programs are regularly available—an aim that has been especially pressing since 2012, when judges began being able to use approved courses in fairness and diversity training to fulfill the four-hour ethics requirement they must meet every three years. At the same time, an additional requirement was instituted for new judges: they must attend a full day, in-person fairness and diversity training within three years of becoming a judge. As a result of the standing committee's efforts, the vast majority of Florida's judges and senior judges have attended a full-day diversity education program.

Since 2006, one of the standing committee's predominant tasks has been to ensure that diversity awareness programs are regularly available—an aim that has been especially pressing since 2012, when judges began being able to use approved courses in fairness and diversity training to fulfill the four-hour ethics requirement they must meet every three years. At the same time, an additional requirement was instituted for new judges: they must attend a full day, in-person fairness and diversity training within three years of becoming a judge.

To provide the needed diversity and sensitivity awareness education in fiscal year 2012 - 13, the standing committee worked in conjunction with the trial courts and the DCAs, the voluntary bar associations, and the Florida Court Education Council. In the past, diversity trainings were typically local endeavors, taking place at single circuits or DCAs. However, In the last year or so, two standing committee members—Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit, and Judge Peter Estrada, Tenth Circuit—began encouraging circuits to invite neighboring circuits to their training opportunities. As a result, in fiscal year 2012 – 13, the Nineteenth Circuit invited the Fifteenth Circuit to participate in its training, and the Second Circuit extended an invitation to the Third. Feedback has been very positive: by bringing new people into the mix, these trainings have the added benefit of introducing participants to new perspectives and provoking fresh ideas and solutions to diversity issues. The standing committee sponsored another regional training with the support of the Florida Court Education Council: a day-long diversity program for 18 senior judges from the Florida Panhandle. As a result of the standing

committee's efforts, the vast majority of Florida's judges and senior judges have attended a full-day diversity education program.

In addition, the standing committee continues to encourage local courts to educate the public about the court system and strengthen court-community relationships—e.g., through courthouse tours, Justice Teaching and other school initiatives, teen courts, Law Day activities, meet your judge and “inside the courts” programs, speaker's bureaus, and the like. By sharing information with the public about court operations, processes, and procedures, these initiatives contribute to greater understanding of and confidence in the court system. They also create venues in which the courts can facilitate dialogs on fairness and diversity topics.

Finally, Judge Bernstein was recently invited to serve as an advisory board member for the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts. The consortium was established in 1989 to enhance communication between existing and future task forces and commissions on racial and ethnic bias in the judiciary. Together, the organization's 37 member states work to address and build solutions for fairness issues and to share research and resources. One of the consortium's current projects involves capturing the oral histories of all its member states. Ms Karen Samuel, OSCA human resources officer and lead staff for the standing committee, calls this a “very important opportunity to document Florida's years of work on fairness and diversity and its long commitment to eliminating bias from court operations; it's a chance to tell our story, something that's never been done before.”

Court Interpreters Program

By and large, Americans relish their nation's cultural diversity. Most would agree that the rich tapestry of beliefs, values, ideas, knowledge, customs, and culinary traditions adds depth and nuance to the compass of everyone's life. However, it is also true that this diversity can create challenges, both for the diverse population groups and for the people endeavoring to serve them.

Language barriers are one of these challenges. The most recent US census figures reveal that 12.8 percent of the US household population is foreign born, with 20.3 percent speaking a language other than English at home. And in Florida, these numbers are higher: 19.2 percent of Floridians are foreign born, and 27 percent speak a language other than English at home. Concerned about language barriers, the long-range plan observes that “Non-English speakers and those not fluent in English generally have significant difficulty understanding the court system and may not be able to fully participate in the court process. Our system of jurisprudence may be unfamiliar to citizens from other nations, and may present a level of complexity that is intimidating and frustrating.” The branch continues to address these concerns, building upon programs and initiatives that facilitate meaningful access to the courts by linguistic minorities.



Eighth Circuit Judge William E. Davis, new chair of the Court Interpreter Certification Board, hands a plaque to outgoing chair Judge Ronald Ficarrotta, Thirteenth Circuit, commending his “tireless advocacy to reduce communication and language barriers on behalf of the State Courts System.”

One way to reduce the effect of language barriers is to ensure that the courts have available a pool of capable court interpreters. To help judges and trial court administrators evaluate the credentials of foreign language interpreters seeking appointment, the supreme court established the Court Interpreter Certification Board in

2006. Chaired by Judge Ronald Ficarrotta, Thirteenth Circuit, from June 2007 through June 2013—and now chaired by Judge William E. Davis, Eighth Circuit—the board is responsible for certifying, regulating, and disciplining court interpreters as well as for suspending and revoking certification.

Soon after its inception, the board developed and implemented a comprehensive set of certification requirements that aim to ensure that Florida’s certified court interpreters have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to carry out their duties competently, fairly, and efficiently. Judges are required, whenever possible, to appoint certified or duly qualified court interpreters (currently, Florida’s courts have 223 certified interpreters).

Among the requirements for maintaining certification, court interpreters must earn a minimum of 16 hours of continuing interpreter education credits every two years. Continuing education was phased in on July 1, 2010, and, since that time, more than 50 continuing interpreter education programs have received board approval. All the education programs were offered by private entities, at first. But starting in fiscal year 2011 – 12, several circuits began developing trainings tailored to the specific needs of their court interpreters. In the last two years, the Seventh, Ninth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Judicial Circuits each designed, and received approval for, several



Pictured here is the five-person team that Chief Justice Ricky Polston sent to the National Language Access Summit (l – r): Lisa Bell, OSCA senior court operations consultant; Judge J. Kevin Abdoney, Polk County; Tom Genung, trial court administrator with the Nineteenth Circuit; Judge William E. Davis, Eighth Circuit; and Lisa Goodner, state courts administrator.

education programs, on topics like ethics, forensics, consecutive interpreting, remote interpreting, “inside the courts,” and various family law-related issues. In addition, in fiscal year 2012 – 13, the Tenth Circuit hosted the first statewide training for court interpreters. This intensive, two-day training was specifically geared toward certification-bound Spanish language staff interpreters who were preparing to take the court interpreter oral performance exam. Funded by the Florida Court Education Council, this “Spanish-English interpreter boot camp” offered the 22 participants sessions on sight translation, consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, memory skills, note-taking skills, and legal vocabulary building; the program culminated in a mock exam.

In addition to increasing the availability and effectiveness of court interpreters through the implementation of a formal court interpreter certification and regulation program and through the institution of continuing education requirements, the judicial branch has taken other steps to enhance language access in the court system. For instance, it established a language access plan in 2010 (via the Trial Court Performance and Accountability publication, *Recommendations for the Provision of Court Interpreting Services in Florida's Trial Courts*); it developed the *Florida Benchguide on Court Interpreting*, which addresses the need for, and use of, both spoken language services and services for the deaf and hard of hearing (2012); and it recently established a higher base rate of pay for court employee interpreters, ensuring that employees who are certified or will become certified are provided a fair salary adjustment.

These Florida initiatives were the subject of much consideration and discussion at the October 2012 National Language Access Summit in Houston, which was attended by 300 court leaders from 49 states, three territories, and DC. Chief Justice Polston appointed a five-member team to attend: State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner; three members of the Court Interpreter Certification Board—Judge William E. Davis, Eighth Circuit; Judge J. Kevin Abdoney, Polk County; and Trial Court Administrator Tom Genung, Nineteenth Circuit—and Ms Lisa Bell,

Remote interpreting has numerous benefits: it eliminates travel, thereby reducing delays resulting from interpreters having to walk or drive between courtroom locations—and also decreasing interpreter “downtime” between hearings; because it supports the delivery of interpreting services in simultaneous mode (which is more efficient than consecutive mode), remote interpreting technology also reduces delays in court proceedings; it enables circuits to maximize the use of state certified staff interpreters (and to minimize reliance on interpreters who have not received state certification), thereby improving the effectiveness of interpreting services; and it increases the opportunity to share interpreter resources among circuits and even other states, which has significant cost-savings potential.

an OSCA senior court operations consultant who has served as the Court Interpreter Program administrator since 2002. The summit introduced participants to national interpreting trends and also provided an engaging forum for sharing successful approaches and evidence-based practices for addressing language access-related challenges in the courts.

The summit also gave each team an opportunity to evaluate its own state’s language access-related initiatives—both in and of themselves and in comparison with other state courts. After enumerating Florida’s accomplishments and considering those of other court systems, the Florida team had reason to be pleased with the branch’s progress. However, members also acknowledged that Florida’s court system can do even more to strengthen court interpreting services and reduce language barriers for linguistic minorities.

Auspiciously, punctuating the summit were several opportunities for each state team to meet on its own to devise an action plan for improving language access services in its court system. The Florida team identified six priorities for the supreme court’s consideration: designate a language access advisory committee to make policy

recommendations to the court; evaluate existing standards and best practices; conduct outreach on collaborating with other entities (e.g., universities, national testing organizations) to expand interpreter resources; enhance judicial education; institute a grievance complaint process; and enhance remote interpreting services. The court approved all six recommendations, and the board is now following up on them.

Regarding the recommendation to enhance remote interpreting services, the branch has actually been working to harness technology for this purpose for quite a few years already. Remote interpreting, which makes use of audio (and often video) technology to connect interpreters to any courtroom, has numerous benefits: it eliminates travel, thereby reducing delays resulting from interpreters having to walk or drive between courtroom locations—and also decreasing interpreter “downtime” between hearings; because it supports the delivery of interpreting services in simultaneous mode (which is more efficient than consecutive mode), remote interpreting technology also reduces delays in court proceedings; it enables circuits to maximize the use of state certified staff interpreters (and to minimize reliance on interpreters who have not received state certification), thereby improving the effectiveness of interpreting services; and it increases the opportunity to share interpreter resources among circuits and even other states, which has significant cost-savings potential.

Several Florida circuits already utilize remote court interpreting systems. The first to develop a system was the Ninth Circuit, which established its Remote Court Interpreting Program in 2007. Indeed, the Ninth has been invited to give numerous national presentations about, and has received two awards for, its program (it was a finalist for the National Association of Court Management’s Justice Achievement Award in 2010, and, in 2012, it received a GCN Award, which honors federal and state/local government teams for extraordinary IT accomplishments). A few years later, the Seventeenth Circuit developed a Remote Interpreting System that it began piloting in 2010. Then in 2012, the Seventh Circuit participated in a trial of a system called the “regional model” solution; this model received a boost in the 2013 legislative session, when lawmakers appropriated \$100,000 to support continued piloting efforts.

For the pilot, the branch is expanding the trial to include two circuits, the Ninth and the Fifteenth, so that it can develop more specific guidelines for the sharing of interpreter resources. The pilot should clarify the impact of the regional model on courtroom participants as well as on court administration and court technology staff, and it should also cast light on the suitability of this model for certain types of proceedings. Overall, the pilot will enable the branch to determine whether this solution improves the delivery of interpreting services—and thereby bolsters the court system’s efforts to ensure that people with limited English proficiency can participate meaningfully in court processes.

Court Access for People with Disabilities

Often called the most significant piece of federal legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed by Congress in 1990, was designed to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities that are available to people without disabilities. The ADA applies to people who have impairments that substantially limit major life activities—like seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, working, learning, and caring for oneself.

According to the most recent census data, one in five people in Florida report having one or more disabilities. Since the risk of having a disability increases with successively older age groups, and since 18.2 percent of Floridians are over 65 years old (the highest rate in the country), this number is expected to grow. To meet the goal of providing “meaningful access to Florida’s courts for all people,” Long-Range Issue #4 plan encourages the judicial branch to continue its endeavors to ensure that people with disabilities can effectively participate in court processes.

Since the enactment of the ADA, for instance, Florida's court system has consistently exceeded the requirement that public entities with 50 or more employees assign at least one employee to coordinate ADA compliance: in fact, since 1990, each of Florida's circuit and appellate courts has had at least one ADA coordinator to facilitate compliance at the local level, and the branch has also had a statewide ADA coordinator to provide technical assistance to judicial officers and court employees regarding court compliance with the ADA.



At the recent statewide education program for the court system's ADA coordinators, conferees participated in a blindfold activity that gave them a chance to feel what it's like to be a person with a disability who is trying to make his or her way through a courthouse; here, Stephen Nevels, marshal at the First DCA, guides a blindfolded Gino Detrick, deputy marshal at the Fourth DCA.

Efforts to minimize the effects of physical barriers to Florida's courts were bolstered in 2006, when then Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis appointed a committee to oversee a multi-year, branch-wide court accessibility initiative. Members of the Court Accessibility Subcommittee developed a courts-specific survey instrument to identify architectural barriers in public areas of court facilities, worked with chief judges to create a Court Accessibility Team in each circuit and DCA, and provided regional training sessions to teach the teams how to survey and evaluate their court facilities. Thereafter, each team developed a transition plan that identified its court's barriers, devised measures for addressing the problems, and determined who would be responsible for correcting the problems. Even with constricted funding at the state and local levels, Florida's courts have continued to work steadily to eliminate barriers as the funding and circumstances arise.

In fiscal year 2012 – 13, for instance, the Fourteenth Circuit, while modifying the clerks stations to accommodate new technology, took the opportunity to upgrade them in accordance with the 2010 ADA Standards. Similarly, when the Eighteenth Circuit updated its assistive listening devices in Seminole County, it replaced them with devices that meet the 2010 ADA Standards. And in the Twentieth Circuit, court personnel—in response to a request to review the evacuation signage and areas of refuge for people who might need assistance evacuating their courthouses in an emergency—worked together with their local fire marshals, county facility managers, and county staff to investigate the emergency egress process in their circuit's courthouses; in their review, they evaluated the stairwells, tested emergency audio boxes, examined evacuation chairs, and inspected emergency lighting. As a result of this process, the circuit added Area of Rescue Assistance signs to the courthouses in two of its counties, updated emergency contact names and numbers, and revised its emergency evacuation manuals.

To support ongoing efforts to ensure that their courts provide meaningful access for all people, the ADA coordinators in each circuit and appellate court enjoy a tradition of bimonthly conference calls that give them a chance to hear about resources available to them, share solutions for challenging situations, find out about pertinent developments and events, and learn about topics of interest from guest speakers. Speakers during the 2012 – 13 fiscal year gave presentations on topics such as the role of wheelchair lifts in providing universal access for courthouses; the process used by the Florida Commission on Human Relations in handling employment discrimination claims based on disability; electrical and multiple chemical sensitivities; and legal resources available to vulnerable elders.

This year's premier education event for ADA coordinators was a statewide, two-day, in-person education program—the first such training designed for them since 2005. Funded by the Florida Court Education Council

and coordinated by the branch's statewide ADA coordinator, Ms Debbie Howells, the event offered 40 coordinators, both veteran and neophyte, a brimful, wide-ranging curriculum that addressed, among other topics, Title I and Title II Guidelines; the 2010 ADA Standards; the ADA Amendments Act of 2008; complaints, grievances, and investigations; electronic accessibility; and the intersection of the ADA, the Family Medical Leave Act, and Workers Compensation. In addition, attendees heard a case law update and learned about community resources as well as about advances in auxiliary aids and services. They also participated in experiential learning activities to sensitize them to what court users with disabilities undergo when calling or trying to navigate the courthouse. Finally, they were treated to two personal, first-hand accounts of some of the daily life challenges faced by people with disabilities. The program was a huge success, and it is anticipated that another will be developed in the near future.

Finally, for court employees who have ADA questions and for court users who need assistance negotiating the justice system, Ms Howells continues to build the branch's library of electronic resources. She is currently consolidating and enhancing the ADA site on the court system's intranet; from a single page, court employees can now link to material on Title I, Title II, and Other Helpful Information (e.g., on electronic accessibility, planning accessible meetings, the grievance procedure). Also from this site, court employees can link to a new document, "ADA Compliance in the Florida State Courts: A Quick Overview," which offers a definition of disability and provides information on Title I, Title II, and the court ADA coordinators. In addition, because elders often brave challenges that overlap with those that people with disabilities face, Ms Howells created a webpage called Helpful Court and Legal Information for Elders, which is prominently posted on the Florida Courts homepage. Elders and their caregivers can now access a host of useful justice system-related documents and information, all gathered together. ([Take this link to the webpage with resources for elders.](#))



Twentieth Circuit staff recently reviewed their evacuation signage and areas of refuge for people who might need assistance evacuating their courthouses in an emergency; among other modifications and updates, the circuit added Area of Rescue Assistance signs to the courthouses in two of its counties.

Long-Range Issue #5: Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence

Regardless of the economic and political challenges, the branch must remain steadfast in its commitment to maintain and consistently build the public's trust and confidence.

The five issues that constitute the long-range plan are equal in weight and comparable in significance; they are also strikingly interconnected. But enhancing Public Trust and Confidence comes last because it is, in many ways, the culmination of the issues that precede it—the fruit of the judicial branch's efforts to accomplish the goals of the four issues on which trust and confidence in the courts is built: Strengthening Governance and Independence, Improving the Administration of Justice, Supporting Competence and Quality, and Enhancing Court Access and Services. Thus, one of the outgrowths of the branch's pursuit of the goals identified in the long-range plan is a fostering of the public's trust and confidence in the courts.

Another way the branch aims to earn that trust and confidence is by aspiring to live up to the five fundamental values that inform its vision—that "Justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable."

This annual report has chronicled many of the ways in which the court system has endeavored to meaningfully embody these values.

Through its emergency management policies and procedures, which are designed to keep the courts open, even in a crisis; through its efforts to reduce physical, communication, and language barriers; and through its adoption of new technologies that enable the electronic transmission of court records and that make court information digitally available to the public, the judicial branch strives to be **accessible** (see Long-Range Issues #2 and 4).

Through its education and training initiatives, which equip judges and court personnel with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that foster the impartial administration of justice; through its commitment to initiatives that promote fairness and diversity awareness; and through its efforts to enable all people to participate fully, effectively, and with dignity in court proceedings, the judicial branch seeks to be **fair** (see Long-Range Issues #3 and 4).

Through its determination to establish a permanent, stable funding source; through its endeavors to improve the management of the court system; through its commitment to innovative alternative dispute resolution processes; through its measures for monitoring performance and managing its resources; through its various court improvement measures, including its expansion of problem-solving dockets; and through its high-quality education and training

And yet another way in which the branch seeks to earn the public's trust and confidence is through advancing public education about the courts. Studies have shown that when people have a greater understanding of and knowledge about the American justice system and the role of the courts within it, their confidence in and support for the courts is bolstered. In developing educational opportunities for people of all ages, the branch provides Floridians with forums for learning about the role, functions, and accomplishments of their courts—and it also helps to cultivate a more engaged, active, and conscientious citizenry.

opportunities, which support the efforts of judges and court personnel to capably carry out the challenging work of the courts, the judicial branch aims to be **effective** (see Long-Range Issues #1, 2, and 3).

Through its work to eliminate impediments to court access (language barriers, communication hurdles, cultural and attitudinal biases, architectural obstructions, etc.) and through its long history of comprehensive outreach initiatives that seek to sustain a fruitful two-way communication, both with those outside of the court system as well as those within it, the branch aspires to be **responsive** (see Long-Range Issues #1, 2, and 4).

And through its commitment to develop standards for monitoring and measuring court performance; through its implementation of pioneering and quantifiable family court initiatives; and through its support of problem-solving dockets, which produce positive outcomes while saving taxpayer dollars, the branch strives to be **accountable** (see Long-Range Issues #1 and 2).

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Education and Outreach

Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums

Established in 1998, the Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums are typically offered in the spring of election years in every circuit in which a contested judicial election is taking place. In these 90-minute sessions, judicial candidates learn about the requirements of Canon 7 of the *Code of Judicial Conduct*, which governs political conduct by judges and judicial candidates. The forums focus on the importance of integrity and professionalism among candidates for political office, the impact of campaign conduct on public trust and confidence in the system, and the grave consequences of any breaches to the code.

The forums are coordinated by the supreme court, the trial court chief judges, the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee, and the Board of Governors of The Florida Bar. In addition to judicial candidates, the forums are open to campaign managers and their staff, local political party chairs, the presidents of local bar associations, the media, and the public. The next set of forums will be held in spring 2014.

Annual Reporters Workshop

For more than two decades, the supreme court has been hosting an annual Reporters Workshop, a two-day event designed to teach the basics of legal reporting to journalists who are new to the legal/courts “beat.” Presented by the Florida Bar Media and Communications Law Committee and subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation, the workshop is open to newspaper, radio news, TV news, and internet news services reporters who have been nominated to attend by their editors. Sessions are led by justices, judges, attorneys, professors, and seasoned reporters.



Justice Peggy A. Quince and Craig Waters, the supreme court’s director of public information, welcome Reporters Workshop participants to the supreme court and lead them on a tour of the building.

The September 2012 workshop included sessions on reporting high profile cases, judicial elections and merit retention, lawyer regulation, court and Bar resources on the internet, journalism in the world of social media, libel laws and defamation, public records, and covering the courts: a candid discussion with judges. Because the public continues to get most of its information about the court system from traditional news sources, the branch recognizes that it must take a proactive role in deepening the news media’s understanding of the court system: this workshop provides reporters with a helpful introduction to covering justice system issues.

Justice Teaching Initiative

Justice Teaching, established by then Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis in 2006, is a law-related education initiative that aims to partner a legal professional with every elementary, middle, and high school in the state. The goal of the initiative is to promote an understanding of Florida’s justice system and laws, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and demonstrate the effective interaction of Florida’s courts within the constitutional structure.

Currently, more than 4,000 lawyers and judges have been trained to serve as resources for Justice Teaching, and all of the state’s public schools—as well as 391 of its private schools—have Justice Teaching volunteers. After participating in a Justice Teaching training session, volunteers have access to a plethora of tested, interactive strategies for involving students in lively exchanges about the justice system and how it affects their lives. ([Take this link to the Justice Teaching website.](#))



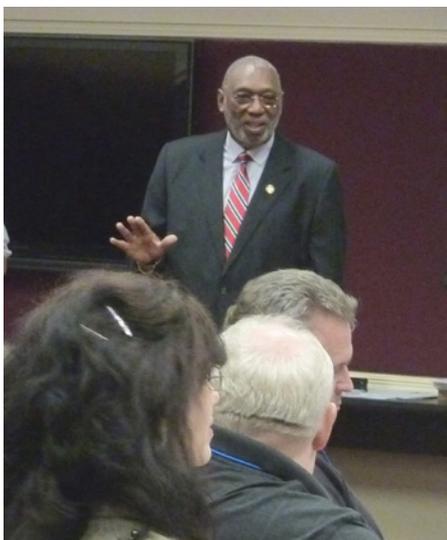
In 2006, Justice R. Fred Lewis established the Justice Teaching Initiative, a law-related education initiative designed to partner a legal professional with every elementary, middle, and high school in the state; currently, more than 4,000 lawyers and judges have been trained to serve as resources for the initiative.

Justice Teaching Institute

The Justice Teaching Institute was first offered in 1997, when then Chief Justice Gerald Kogan conceptualized it as a part of the Florida Supreme Court’s Sesquicentennial Celebration. Since then, each year, the institute selects 25 secondary school teachers from across the state to participate in a comprehensive, five-day education program on the fundamentals of the judicial branch. The program is sponsored by the supreme court, subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation, and coordinated by the Florida Law Related Education Association.



Justice Charles T. Canady introduces Justice Teaching fellows to the structure, function, and funding of the state courts system.



Justice James E.C. Perry leads Justice Teaching Institute participants on a Florida constitution scavenger hunt.

Taught primarily by the seven justices, two “mentor judges” (this year, Judge Michael Genden, Eleventh Circuit, and Judge Kelly J. McKibben, Eighteenth Circuit), and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, the institute delves into the structure and function of the state courts system, the state versus the federal court systems, the criminal court process, the Florida constitution, the case study method, accessing legal resources, the oral argument process, the role of a fair and impartial judiciary, the Code of Judicial Conduct, and the constitutional issues underlying an actual case that is about to be argued before the court. The culmination of the program is the teachers’ own mock oral argument on the very case for which the justices themselves are preparing.

When teachers return to their classrooms, most of them develop a courts unit for their students. And many facilitate training programs for other teachers at their school. Thus with each class of institute fellows, the branch stimulates a ripple effect, creating an ever-increasing number of opportunities for students to develop an understanding of and appreciation for the role and functions of the Third Branch. ([Take this link to learn more about the Justice Teaching Institute.](#))



Justices pose with Justice Teaching Institute fellows in the supreme court courtroom.

Visiting the Courts: Oral Arguments and Educational Tours and Programs

Tallahassee residents and guests to the capital city have a variety of possibilities from which to choose if they are interested in learning about the history and purpose of the state's highest court and the fundamentals of Florida's court system.

One of the most engrossing ways to learn about the inner workings of the supreme court is to attend oral arguments—a “conversation” between the justice and attorneys, during which the attorneys clarify the legal reasons for their position and answer questions posed by the justices. Oral arguments are held once a month, generally during the first full week of each month, from September through June. For most cases, arguments last approximately 40 minutes (20 minutes each side), and argument sessions typically comprise four cases. Visitors are welcome to observe oral arguments (the courtroom holds up to 165 visitors), and no appointment is necessary. ([This link goes to information about and the schedule for oral arguments.](#)) Those who cannot attend oral arguments or who wish to view archived ones can access them online via WFSU's Gavel to Gavel. ([This link goes to Gavel to Gavel.](#))

Visitors who want to learn about the supreme court building are welcome to take a self-guided tour, which lets them explore the building at their own pace. Fitted with informational brochures, they can tour the public areas of the building (courtroom, library, rare book room, lower rotunda, portrait gallery, and Lawyer's Lounge). Alternatively, they can participate in the Educational Tour Experience, a guided tour that brings the history of the court alive, delighting guests with intriguing facts about the building and its inhabitants past and present. Accommodating groups of all ages—both student and adult groups—this tour, which lasts 40 to 45 minutes, focuses on the judicial branch, Florida's court system, the differences between trial and appellate courts, the role of the justices, and the appointment and retention processes.



Justice Barbara J. Pariente provides a lively Introduction to the Court to the children participating in this year's Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day.

Another supreme court-based educational opportunity is the Mock Oral Argument Experience—which tends to be the favorite activity of the student groups that visit the court. Students spend the first part of the 90-minute program learning about the judicial branch and Florida's court system. Then, playing the part of justices, attorneys, the clerk, and the marshal, the students, led by a staff attorney or trained volunteer, act out an oral argument on an age-suitable hypothetical case (the court offers 18 cases from which to choose).



Chief Justice Ricky Polston talks to a local seventh grade class about the Florida court system.

All told, in the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, the court led 107 educational tours and guided 110 student groups through the Mock Oral Argument Experience. Between them, the two programs reached 7,082 participants.

Finally, student groups from Leon County can participate in the Journey Through Justice Program, which

works in conjunction with the Courtroom to Courtroom Program offered by the Leon County Teen Court. Students gain a comprehensive understanding of the court system and Florida's third branch of government through participating both in a mock trial, which introduces them to the various roles in a trial courtroom, and a mock oral argument, which builds critical thinking skills. ([Take this link for more information on these educational programs.](#))



Tricia Knox, education and information administrator with the supreme court, introduces visiting youngsters to a court-related learning activity.

In addition to these supreme court-based education and outreach initiatives, every circuit and appellate court in the state offers a variety of programs and activities that inform the public about the court system and boost court-community relationships—endeavors like courthouse tours, citizen guides, Justice Teaching and other school outreach efforts, teen courts, Law Day and Constitution Day activities, moot court competitions, Take Your Child to Work Day, Girls State and Boys State activities, meet your judge programs, speakers bureaus, public opinion surveys, and media outreach efforts. ([Follow this link to learn more about these activities.](#))

Florida Supreme Court Library

Established in 1845, the Florida Supreme Court Library is the oldest of Florida's state-supported libraries. Originally intended for use by the supreme court and the attorneys practicing before it, it now serves the entire state courts system. The library also answers calls for support from law firms and other law libraries in the state and around the country. The library is open to the public: visitors come to do legal or historical research, and the library also welcomes school and adult groups, who come to explore the rare book room and behold the archival rarities on display in the reading room.

Among the library's print collection are historical Florida primary legal resources going back to the state's territorial period as well as many updated treatises and other legal reference materials. The library has been designated a federal depository library for legal materials published by the Government Printing Office; it also has an extensive collection of historical statute law of the United Kingdom and Canada. ([Follow this link to visit the law library's website.](#))

During the 2012 – 13 fiscal year, the library received two significant collections of historical papers. First, it received a set of Justice Ben F. Overton's personal and professional papers, donated in 2013 by his family after his death (he was on the supreme court bench from 1974 – 1999). Among these papers are his copious notes from his years of teaching at the University of Florida Law School after his retirement from the court as well as the materials he gathered or produced while chairing the US Constitution Bicentennial Commission of Florida (from 1987 to 1991). During his lifetime, Justice Overton also donated a multitude of papers to the library; now housed in 117 boxes are many of his supreme court opinions, speeches, teaching notes, letters, articles, and jottings taken while serving on various court committees. The supreme court archivist recently completed an inventory of these papers, and the newly-acquired documents, once they are inventoried, will be added to this collection.

The second set of papers donated to the library includes materials related to the revision of section 14 to Article V of the Florida Constitution, commonly called Revision 7, the purpose of which was to relieve local governments of the increasing costs of subsidizing the trial courts and to ensure equity in court funding across each county in the state. These papers, which were donated by OSCA, comprise committee reports, educational materials, and other documents produced during the process of implementing Revision 7, which stretched from 1999 until July 1, 2004. But the collection also includes materials that date back to the late 1970s, when Florida first began considering the need for a uniform funding system for its trial courts. This donation was just the first of what promises to be many boxes of papers that OSCA has safeguarded since 1972, when the chief justice established the office to provide support in carrying out the branch's administrative duties.

Finally, since 2002, the library has been the caretaker of an historic, curved-glass window that adorned the first Supreme Court Building from when it was built, in 1912, until it was demolished, in 1978. This elegant window, which is etched with the official supreme court seal, had been donated to the Florida Supreme Court Historical Society and was held in the library for safekeeping. For over a decade, the window had been kept out of view because of its fragility. When historical society funds became available, library staff worked closely with the society to arrange the construction of a custom-built mahogany display case for the window. The window is now on permanent display in the Lawyer's Lounge of the current Supreme Court Building.



Until 1978, this handsome, curved-glass window etched with the supreme court seal adorned Florida's first Supreme Court Building; the window is now permanently established in the Lawyer's Lounge of the current Supreme Court Building.

Court Publications

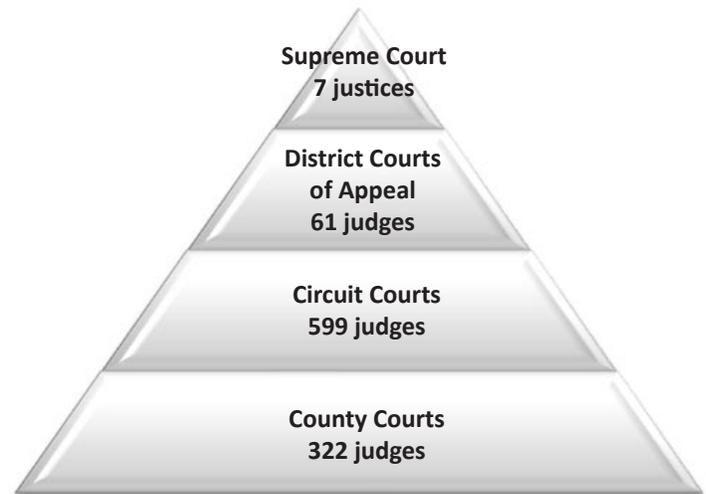
To educate the public about the judicial branch and to enhance communication between the courts and other justice system entities, the legislature, and the executive branch, OSCA's Publications Unit, under the direction of the supreme court, produces the Florida State Courts Annual Report each fall. ([This link goes to the annual reports.](#)) Moreover, in the spring, summer, and winter, the Publications Unit produces the *Full Court Press*, the official newsletter of the state courts system, whose aim is 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. ([Take this link to the newsletters.](#))

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 serves a two-year term, 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 legislative branch, the executive branch, the auxiliary agencies of the court, and national court research and planning agencies.



Appellate Courts

Supreme Court

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

District Courts of Appeal

- 61 judges, six-year terms
- Five districts:
 - 1st District: Tallahassee, 15 judges
 - 2nd District: Lakeland, 14 judges
 - 3rd District: Miami, 10 judges
 - 4th District: West Palm Beach, 12 judges
 - 5th District: Daytona Beach, 10 judges
- Cases generally reviewed by three-judge panels

Trial Courts

Circuit Courts

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

County Courts

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

FLORIDA'S COURT STRUCTURE

Supreme Court of Florida

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

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

District Courts of Appeal

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

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

Circuit Courts

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

County Courts

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

DCA

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

Circuits

Circuit

Counties

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

COURT ADMINISTRATION

Office of the State Courts Administrator

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

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

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



State Courts Administrator Elisabeth H. Goodner.

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.

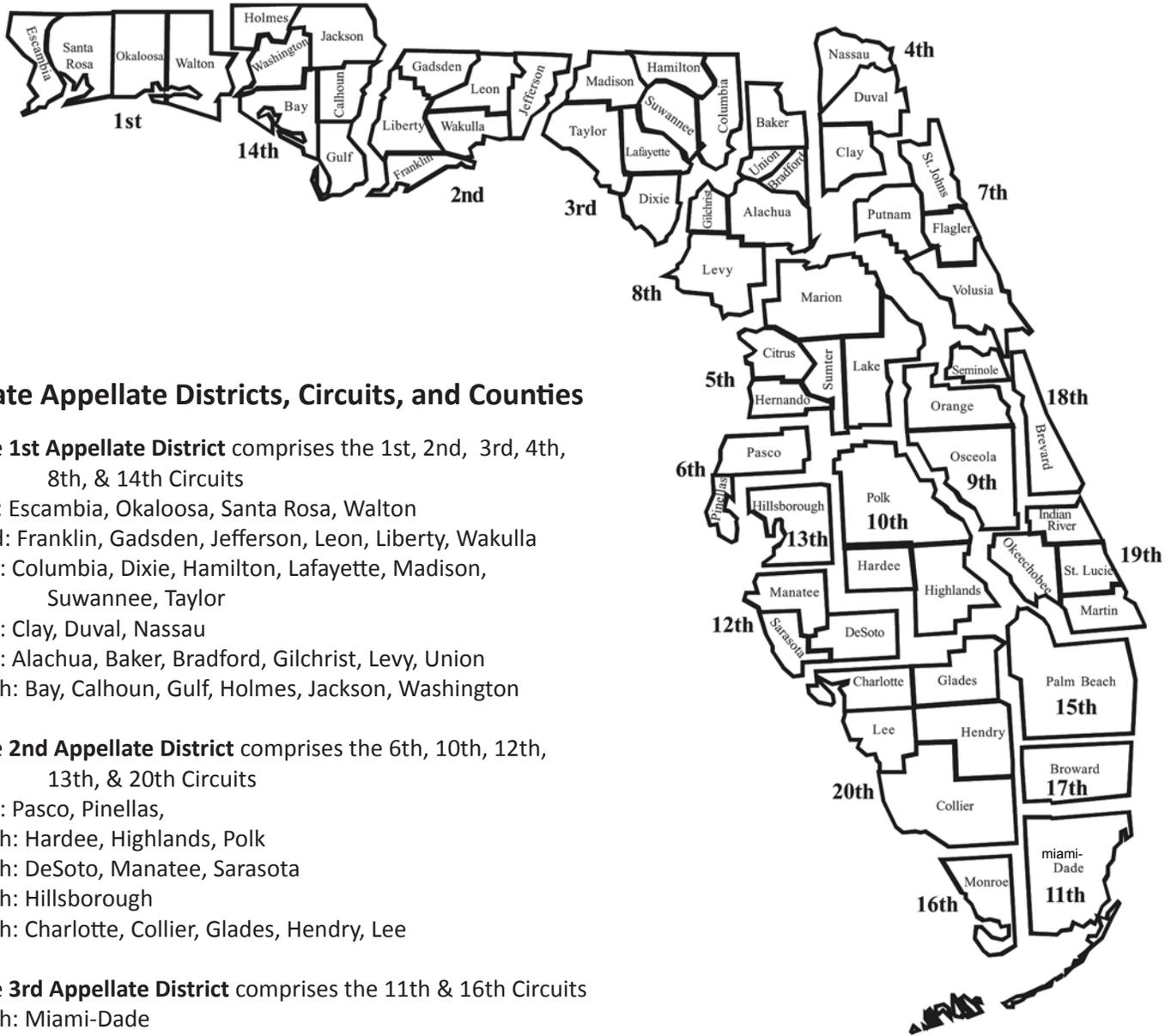
Trial court administrators have multiple responsibilities. They manage judicial operations such as courtroom scheduling, facilities management, caseload policy, ADA policy, statistical analysis, inter-branch and intergovernmental relations, technology planning, jury oversight, public information, and 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/courts/circuit/circuit.shtml>

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.

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
- 2nd: Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Wakulla
- 3rd: Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor
- 4th: Clay, Duval, Nassau
- 8th: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, Union
- 14th: Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Washington

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

- 6th: Pasco, Pinellas,
- 10th: Hardee, Highlands, Polk
- 12th: DeSoto, Manatee, Sarasota
- 13th: Hillsborough
- 20th: Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee

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

- 11th: Miami-Dade
- 16th: Monroe

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

- 15th: Palm Beach
- 17th: Broward
- 19th: Indian River, Okeechobee, St. Lucie, Martin

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

- 5th: Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion, Sumter
- 7th: Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, Volusia
- 9th: Orange, Osceola
- 18th: Brevard, Seminole

JUDICIAL CERTIFICATION TABLE

District Court of Appeal

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2004	4	4	0	0%	62
2005	2	2	0	0%	62
2006	2	2	0	0%	62
2007	2	2	0	0%	62
2008	-1	-1	-1	n/a	61
2009	0	0	0	n/a	61
2010	1	0	0	n/a	61
2011	0	0	0	n/a	61
2012	2	1	0	0%	61
2013	2	1	0	0%	61

Circuit

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2004	54	51	0	0%	527
2005	69	67	37	55.2%	564
2006	41	40	35	87.5%	599
2007	24	22	0	0%	599
2008	44	19	0	0%	599
2009	45	29	0	0%	599
2010	40	37	0	0%	599
2011	40	26	0	0%	599
2012	31	23	0	0%	599
2013	27	16	0	0%	599

County

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2004	38	33	0	0%	280
2005	44	41	22	53.7%	302
2006	26	24	20	83.3%	322
2007	15	13	0	0%	322
2008	46	42	0	0%	322
2009	68	39	0	0%	322
2010	54	53	0	0%	322
2011	55	54	0	0%	322
2012	49	48	0	0%	322
2013	49	47	0	0%	322

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 trial court caseload statistics according to complexity. Cases that are typically complex, such as capital murder cases, receive a higher weight, while cases that are generally less complex, such as civil traffic cases, receive a lower weight. These weights are then applied to case filing statistics to determine the need for additional judgeships.

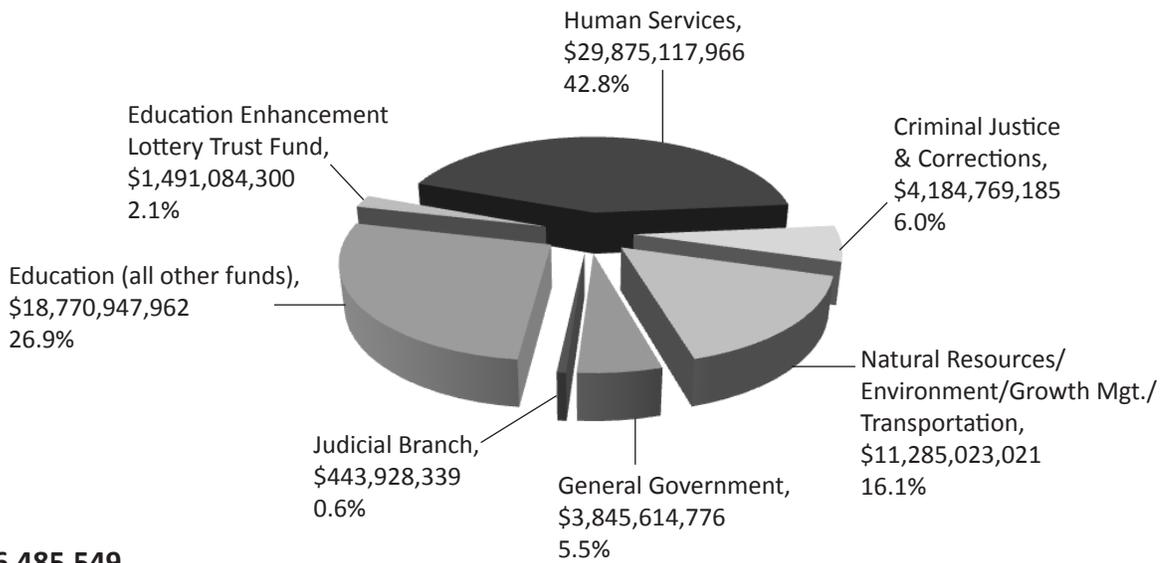
The need for additional judgeships remains high for several reasons: an absence of funding for previously certified judgeships, overall increases in judicial workload, and fewer support staff. If judicial workload continues to exceed capacity and the judicial need deficit is not addressed, likely consequences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

In a December 2012 opinion, the Florida Supreme Court certified the need for one additional DCA judge, 16 additional circuit judges, and 47 additional county court judges. However, the Florida Legislature did not approve funding for any new judgeships this year ([take this link to the opinion](#)).

FLORIDA'S BUDGET

2012-2013 Fiscal Year Appropriations

(For an accessible version of this information, follow this link.)



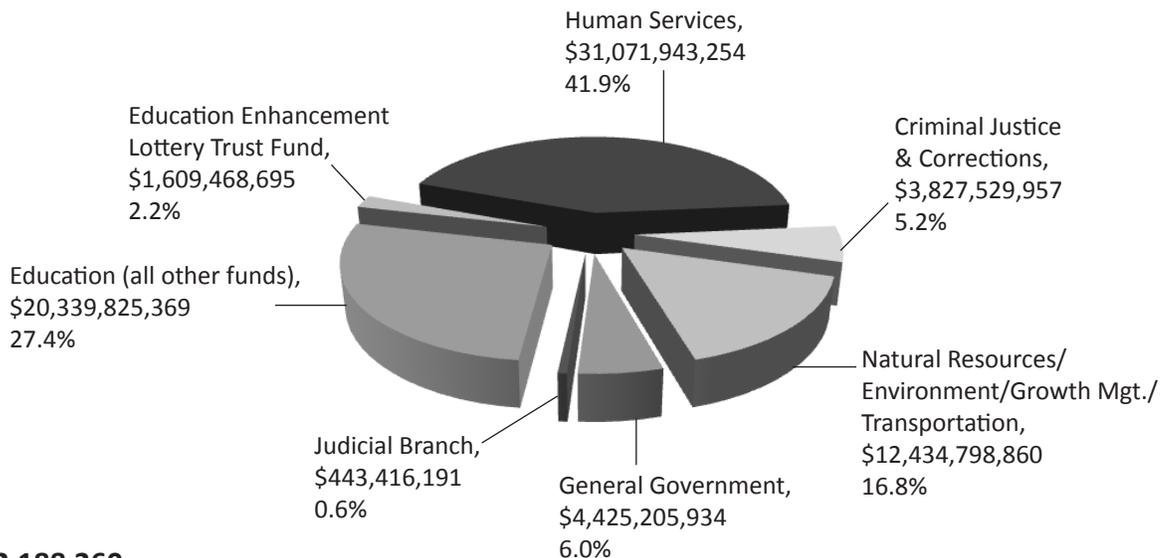
Total: \$69,896,485,549

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

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

2013-2014 Fiscal Year Appropriations

(For an accessible version of this information, follow this link.)



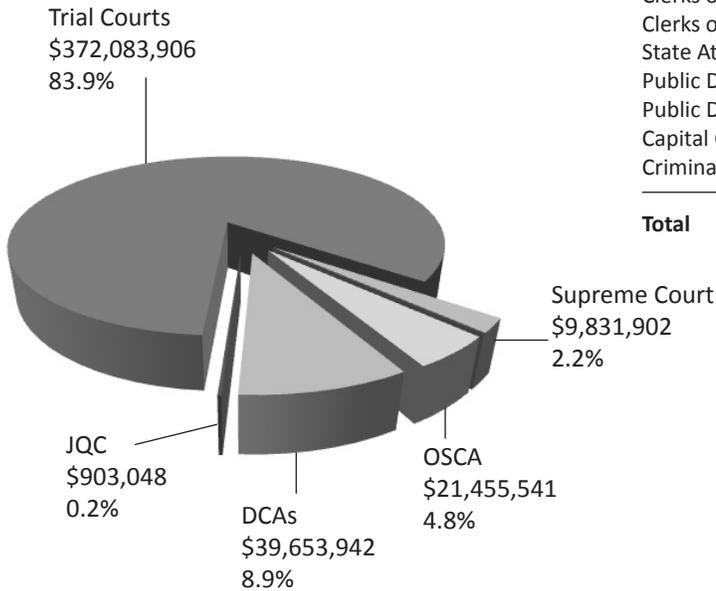
Total: \$74,152,188,260

Note: This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 1500, less vetoes.

STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS

Justice System Appropriations 2012-2013 Fiscal Year

(For an accessible version of this information, follow [this link.](#))



State Courts System	\$443,928,339
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$86,759,552
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$31,977,177
Clerks of Court	\$415,880,312
Clerks of Court Operations Corporation	\$1,614,884
State Attorneys	\$384,417,104
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$184,520,895
Public Defenders Appellate	\$12,976,928
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$6,959,070
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$36,922,933

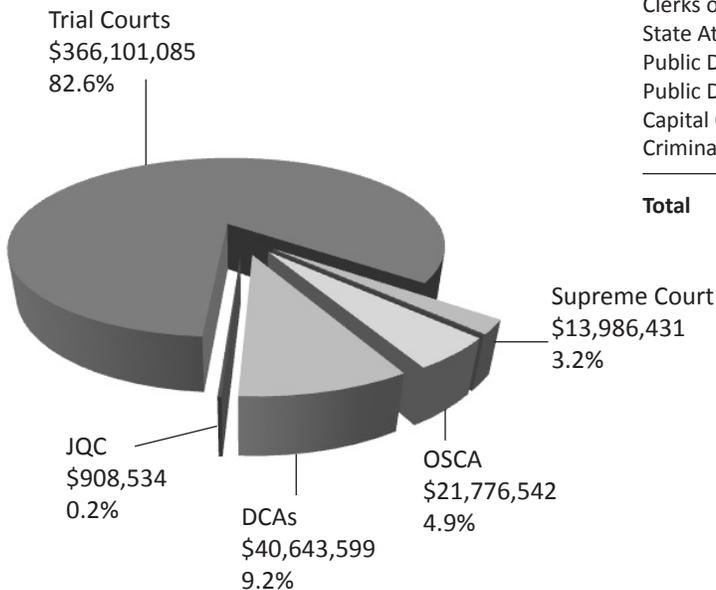
Total \$1,605,957,194

State Courts System Total: 443,928,339

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

Justice System Appropriations 2013-2014 Fiscal Year

(For an accessible version of this information, follow [this link.](#))



State Courts System	\$443,416,191
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$86,924,651
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$34,475,997
Clerks of Court	\$0
Clerks of Court Operations Corporation	\$0
State Attorneys	\$388,004,018
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$188,697,838
Public Defenders Appellate	\$13,689,751
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$7,302,911
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$39,190,160

Total \$1,201,701,517

State Courts System Total: 443,416,191

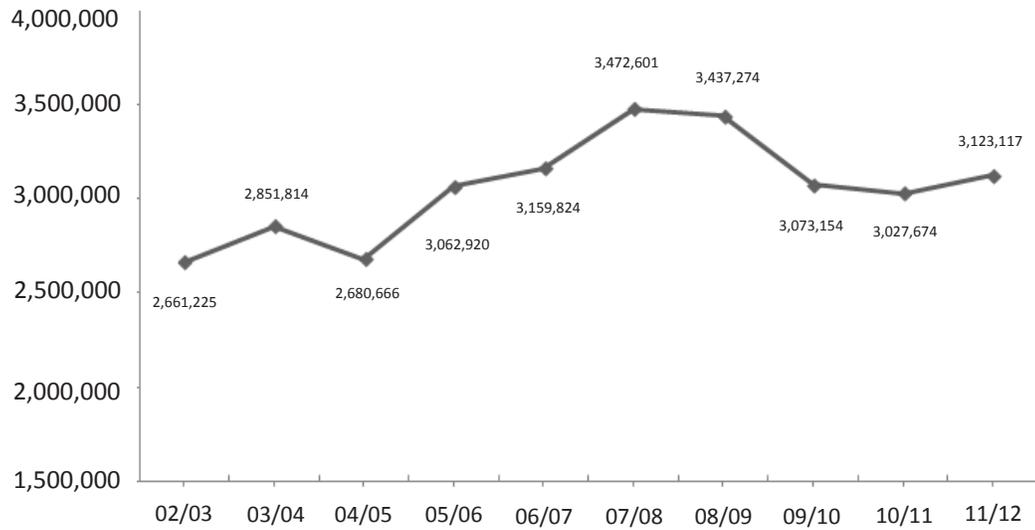
This total reflects those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 1500, less vetoes. (Note: several budget items are not included in this total, e.g., salary increases, the restoration of the 2% salary reduction for judges, and the \$21.3 million to address the foreclosure backlog.)

FILINGS

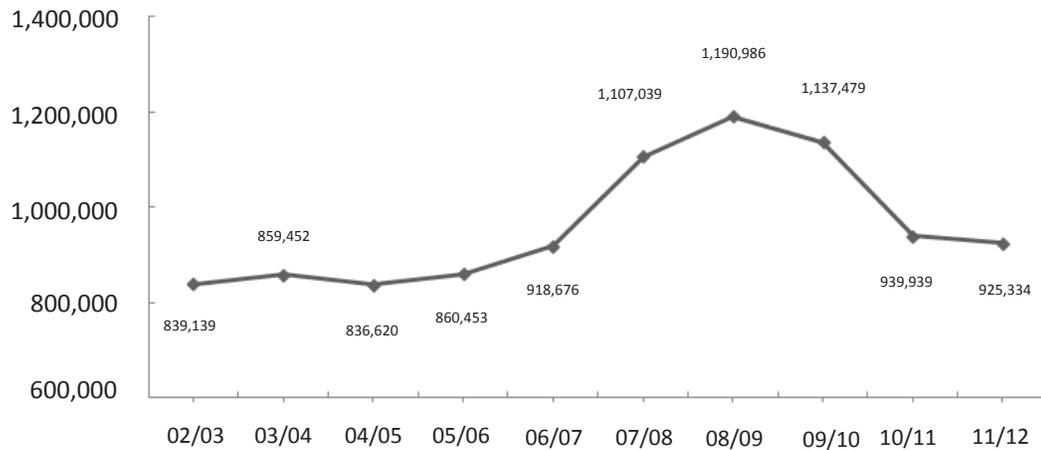
Filings, Florida's Trial Courts FY 2002-03 to 2011-12

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

County Courts



Circuit Courts

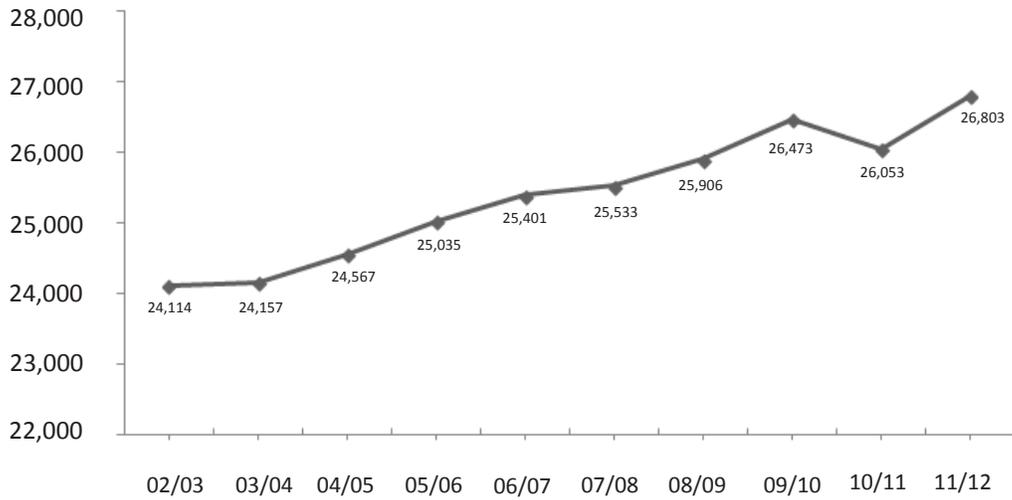


FILINGS

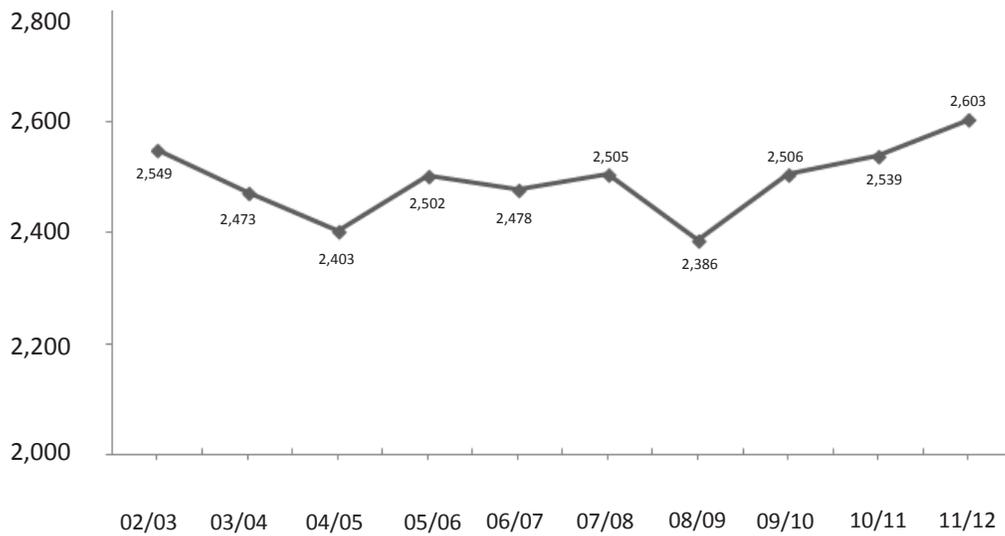
Filings, Florida's Appellate Courts FY 2002-03 to 2011-12

(For an accessible version of these filings, follow this link.)

District Courts



Supreme Court



DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

Notice of Appeal and Petition FY 2011-12

(For an accessible version of these filings, follow this link.)

* Criminal post conviction filings include notice of appeal only.

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
All	Administrative	1,681
All	Civil	5,594
All	Criminal	10,502
All	Criminal Post Conviction*	5,944
All	Family	1,323
All	Juvenile	1,249
All	Probate/Guardianship	204
All	Workers' Compensation	306
		26,803

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
1	Administrative	1,181	3	Administrative	149	5	Administrative	108
	Civil	1,089		Civil	1,114		Civil	793
	Criminal	2,454		Criminal	851		Criminal	2,547
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,174		Criminal Post Conviction*	818		Criminal Post Conviction*	1,116
	Family	248		Family	140		Family	290
	Juvenile	175		Juvenile	268		Juvenile	177
	Probate/Guardianship	25		Probate/Guardianship	50		Probate/Guardianship	31
	Workers' Compensation	306			3,390			5,062
	6,652					Total	26,803	
2	Administrative	96	4	Administrative	147			
	Civil	1,194		Civil	1,404			
	Criminal	2,944		Criminal	1,706			
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,826		Criminal Post Conviction*	1,010			
	Family	318		Family	327			
	Juvenile	418		Juvenile	211			
	Probate/Guardianship	38		Probate/Guardianship	60			
	6,834		4,865					

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

FY 2011-12

(For an accessible version of these filings, follow this link.)

* 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.

Circuit	County	Division	Total Filings
All	All	Adult Criminal	194,351
All	All	Civil	305,804
All	All	Family Court*	323,545
All	All	Probate	101,634
All	All	County Adult Criminal	853,286
All	All	County Civil**	2,269,831
			4,048,451

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

* 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.

Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings
1	Adult Criminal	10,698	8	Adult Criminal	4,851	15	Adult Criminal	9,170
	Civil	7,975		Civil	3,351		Civil	23,056
	Family Court*	15,357		Family Court*	6,963		Family Court*	16,402
	Probate	4,622		Probate	2,163		Probate	7,315
	County Adult Criminal	28,670		County Adult Criminal	19,119		County Adult Criminal	73,301
	County Civil**	32,007		County Civil**	37,984		County Civil**	223,015
	99,329		74,431		352,259			
2	Adult Criminal	4,859	9	Adult Criminal	16,938	16	Adult Criminal	1,244
	Civil	5,578		Civil	25,773		Civil	1,341
	Family Court*	6,755		Family Court*	27,207		Family Court*	1,841
	Probate	2,981		Probate	4,982		Probate	418
	County Adult Criminal	13,068		County Adult Criminal	56,548		County Adult Criminal	4,248
	County Civil**	30,555		County Civil**	135,941		County Civil**	8,826
	63,796		267,389		17,918			
3	Adult Criminal	2,478	10	Adult Criminal	10,003	17	Adult Criminal	16,979
	Civil	1,782		Civil	9,311		Civil	35,150
	Family Court*	4,316		Family Court*	16,546		Family Court*	28,387
	Probate	1,103		Probate	4,360		Probate	8,457
	County Adult Criminal	7,661		County Adult Criminal	34,545		County Adult Criminal	72,596
	County Civil**	14,080		County Civil**	45,335		County Civil**	341,421
	31,420		120,100		502,990			
4	Adult Criminal	11,859	11	Adult Criminal	19,218	18	Adult Criminal	8,949
	Civil	16,085		Civil	49,179		Civil	14,111
	Family Court*	22,066		Family Court*	39,022		Family Court*	15,101
	Probate	5,033		Probate	10,967		Probate	4,633
	County Adult Criminal	56,502		County Adult Criminal	131,125		County Adult Criminal	42,481
	County Civil**	136,084		County Civil**	694,371		County Civil**	72,805
	247,629		943,882		158,080			
5	Adult Criminal	10,546	12	Adult Criminal	6,713	19	Adult Criminal	5,674
	Civil	16,413		Civil	10,823		Civil	9,423
	Family Court*	16,651		Family Court*	11,030		Family Court*	9,764
	Probate	6,656		Probate	6,258		Probate	3,776
	County Adult Criminal	30,170		County Adult Criminal	27,702		County Adult Criminal	22,267
	County Civil**	53,296		County Civil**	42,422		County Civil**	41,202
	133,732		104,948		92,106			
6	Adult Criminal	17,517	13	Adult Criminal	12,810	20	Adult Criminal	8,906
	Civil	22,191		Civil	18,904		Civil	18,767
	Family Court*	22,987		Family Court*	24,976		Family Court*	16,407
	Probate	8,542		Probate	5,941		Probate	6,437
	County Adult Criminal	58,540		County Adult Criminal	62,157		County Adult Criminal	47,685
	County Civil**	77,857		County Civil**	138,238		County Civil**	66,811
	207,634		263,026		165,013			
7	Adult Criminal	9,691	14	Adult Criminal	5,248	Total		4,048,451
	Civil	13,049		Civil	3,542			
	Family Court*	15,628		Family Court*	6,139			
	Probate	5,302		Probate	1,688			
	County Adult Criminal	47,284		County Adult Criminal	17,617			
	County Civil**	54,576		County Civil**	23,005			
	145,530		57,239					

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

FY 2011-12

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

* 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.

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
1 Escambia	Adult Criminal	5,526	Leon	Adult Criminal	3,201	Madison	Adult Criminal	295
	Civil	3,013		Civil	3,949		Civil	151
	Family Court*	7,614		Family Court*	4,610		Family Court*	379
	Probate	2,759		Probate	2,188		Probate	130
	County Adult Criminal	13,821		County Adult Criminal	8,427		County Adult Criminal	957
County Civil**	9,470	County Civil**	19,468	County Civil**	2,965			
		42,203			41,843			4,877
Okaloosa	Adult Criminal	2,391	Liberty	Adult Criminal	107	Suwannee	Adult Criminal	686
	Civil	2,257		Civil	59		Civil	377
	Family Court*	4,108		Family Court*	122		Family Court*	1,036
	Probate	985		Probate	27		Probate	217
	County Adult Criminal	6,775		County Adult Criminal	194		County Adult Criminal	1,360
County Civil**	11,673	County Civil**	518	County Civil**	1,976			
		28,189			1,027			5,652
Santa Rosa	Adult Criminal	1,784	Wakulla	Adult Criminal	351	Taylor	Adult Criminal	285
	Civil	1,486		Civil	413		Civil	174
	Family Court*	2,662		Family Court*	616		Family Court*	557
	Probate	640		Probate	133		Probate	97
	County Adult Criminal	4,879		County Adult Criminal	934		County Adult Criminal	1,076
County Civil**	7,137	County Civil**	1,556	County Civil**	1,580			
		18,588			4,003			3,769
Walton	Adult Criminal	997	3 Columbia	Adult Criminal	847	4 Clay	Adult Criminal	2,671
	Civil	1,219		Civil	702		Civil	2,292
	Family Court*	973		Family Court*	1,567		Family Court*	3,707
	Probate	238		Probate	480		Probate	507
	County Adult Criminal	3,195		County Adult Criminal	2,956		County Adult Criminal	6,354
County Civil**	3,727	County Civil**	5,017	County Civil**	10,932			
		10,349			11,569			26,463
2 Franklin	Adult Criminal	273	Dixie	Adult Criminal	183	Duval	Adult Criminal	8,568
	Civil	263		Civil	92		Civil	12,942
	Family Court*	262		Family Court*	337		Family Court*	17,135
	Probate	84		Probate	81		Probate	4,252
	County Adult Criminal	890		County Adult Criminal	478		County Adult Criminal	47,563
County Civil**	875	County Civil**	1,085	County Civil**	122,065			
		2,647			2,256			212,525
Gadsden	Adult Criminal	669	Hamilton	Adult Criminal	142	Nassau	Adult Criminal	620
	Civil	776		Civil	224		Civil	851
	Family Court*	930		Family Court*	297		Family Court*	1,224
	Probate	468		Probate	63		Probate	274
	County Adult Criminal	2,109		County Adult Criminal	640		County Adult Criminal	2,585
County Civil**	6,141	County Civil**	1,183	County Civil**	3,087			
		11,093			2,549			8,641
Jefferson	Adult Criminal	258	Lafayette	Adult Criminal	40	5 Citrus	Adult Criminal	1,061
	Civil	118		Civil	62		Civil	1,892
	Family Court*	215		Family Court*	143		Family Court*	2,084
	Probate	81		Probate	35		Probate	856
	County Adult Criminal	514		County Adult Criminal	194		County Adult Criminal	3,802
County Civil**	1,997	County Civil**	274	County Civil**	4,750			
		3,183			748			14,445

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
Hernando	Adult Criminal	2,000	St. Johns	Adult Criminal	1,226	9 Orange	Adult Criminal	13,864
	Civil	3,628		Civil	2,541		Civil	20,207
	Family Court*	3,007		Family Court*	2,889		Family Court*	21,215
	Probate	1,801		Probate	781		Probate	4,038
	County Adult Criminal	4,775		County Adult Criminal	5,742		County Adult Criminal	44,921
	County Civil**	11,552		County Civil**	9,140		County Civil**	108,504
		26,763			22,319			212,749
Lake	Adult Criminal	2,872	Volusia	Adult Criminal	6,359	Osceola	Adult Criminal	3,074
	Civil	4,247		Civil	8,109		Civil	5,566
	Family Court*	4,543		Family Court*	9,078		Family Court*	5,992
	Probate	1,704		Probate	3,583		Probate	944
	County Adult Criminal	9,377		County Adult Criminal	33,579		County Adult Criminal	11,627
	County Civil**	17,906		County Civil**	37,621		County Civil**	27,437
		40,649		98,329			54,640	
Marion	Adult Criminal	3,792	8 Alachua	Adult Criminal	2,800	10 Hardee	Adult Criminal	316
	Civil	4,778		Civil	2,121		Civil	182
	Family Court*	6,167		Family Court*	4,397		Family Court*	550
	Probate	1,901		Probate	1,595		Probate	100
	County Adult Criminal	10,211		County Adult Criminal	14,056		County Adult Criminal	1,856
	County Civil**	14,798		County Civil**	26,942		County Civil**	1,870
		41,647		51,911			4,874	
Sumter	Adult Criminal	821	Baker	Adult Criminal	401	Highlands	Adult Criminal	935
	Civil	1,868		Civil	245		Civil	1,052
	Family Court*	850		Family Court*	523		Family Court*	1,773
	Probate	394		Probate	139		Probate	900
	County Adult Criminal	2,005		County Adult Criminal	1,122		County Adult Criminal	2,569
	County Civil**	4,290		County Civil**	2,221		County Civil**	4,588
		10,228		4,651			11,817	
6 Pasco	Adult Criminal	4,704	Bradford	Adult Criminal	775	Polk	Adult Criminal	8,752
	Civil	7,872		Civil	263		Civil	8,077
	Family Court*	8,070		Family Court*	534		Family Court*	14,223
	Probate	2,634		Probate	86		Probate	3,360
	County Adult Criminal	15,544		County Adult Criminal	1,481		County Adult Criminal	30,120
	County Civil**	22,726		County Civil**	5,732		County Civil**	38,877
		61,550		8,871			103,409	
Pinellas	Adult Criminal	12,813	Gilchrist	Adult Criminal	185	11 Miami-Dade	Adult Criminal	19,218
	Civil	14,319		Civil	143		Civil	49,179
	Family Court*	14,917		Family Court*	326		Family Court*	39,022
	Probate	5,908		Probate	63		Probate	10,967
	County Adult Criminal	42,996		County Adult Criminal	480		County Adult Criminal	131,125
	County Civil**	55,131		County Civil**	583		County Civil**	694,371
		146,084		1,780			943,882	
7 Flagler	Adult Criminal	681	Levy	Adult Criminal	491	12 DeSoto	Adult Criminal	489
	Civil	1,718		Civil	431		Civil	351
	Family Court*	1,714		Family Court*	905		Family Court*	569
	Probate	572		Probate	175		Probate	95
	County Adult Criminal	3,680		County Adult Criminal	1,602		County Adult Criminal	1,509
	County Civil**	4,597		County Civil**	1,959		County Civil**	1,510
		12,962		5,563			4,523	
Putnam	Adult Criminal	1,425	Union	Adult Criminal	199	Manatee	Adult Criminal	2,694
	Civil	681		Civil	148		Civil	4,459
	Family Court*	1,947		Family Court*	278		Family Court*	5,105
	Probate	366		Probate	105		Probate	1,752
	County Adult Criminal	4,283		County Adult Criminal	378		County Adult Criminal	12,451
	County Civil**	3,218		County Civil**	547		County Civil**	14,223
		11,920		1,655			40,684	

COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
Sarasota	Adult Criminal	3,530	15 Palm Beach	Adult Criminal	9,170	Okeechobee	Adult Criminal	630
	Civil	6,013		Civil	23,056		Civil	529
	Family Court*	5,356		Family Court*	16,402		Family Court*	757
	Probate	4,411		Probate	7,315		Probate	159
	County Adult Criminal	13,742		County Adult Criminal	73,301		County Adult Criminal	1,833
	County Civil**	26,689		County Civil**	223,015		County Civil**	1,716
		59,741			352,259			5,624
13 Hillsborough	Adult Criminal	12,810	16 Monroe	Adult Criminal	1,244	St. Lucie	Adult Criminal	2,731
	Civil	18,904		Civil	1,341		Civil	4,656
	Family Court*	24,976		Family Court*	1,841		Family Court*	4,938
	Probate	5,941		Probate	418		Probate	1,923
	County Adult Criminal	62,157		County Adult Criminal	4,248		County Adult Criminal	9,665
	County Civil**	138,238		County Civil**	8,826		County Civil**	21,777
		263,026			17,918			45,690
14 Bay	Adult Criminal	3,252	17 Broward	Adult Criminal	16,979	20 Charlotte	Adult Criminal	1,899
	Civil	2,361		Civil	35,150		Civil	2,640
	Family Court*	3,913		Family Court*	28,387		Family Court*	2,435
	Probate	1,021		Probate	8,457		Probate	1,752
	County Adult Criminal	13,341		County Adult Criminal	72,596		County Adult Criminal	5,639
	County Civil**	14,846		County Civil**	341,421		County Civil**	7,371
		38,734			502,990			21,736
Calhoun	Adult Criminal	265	18 Brevard	Adult Criminal	5,859	Collier	Adult Criminal	1,480
	Civil	85		Civil	7,836		Civil	4,561
	Family Court*	298		Family Court*	9,289		Family Court*	3,713
	Probate	77		Probate	2,696		Probate	1,741
	County Adult Criminal	443		County Adult Criminal	24,252		County Adult Criminal	10,361
	County Civil**	828		County Civil**	32,633		County Civil**	18,660
		1,996			82,565			40,516
Gulf	Adult Criminal	276	Seminole	Adult Criminal	3,090	Glades	Adult Criminal	158
	Civil	234		Civil	6,275		Civil	78
	Family Court*	260		Family Court*	5,812		Family Court*	188
	Probate	75		Probate	1,937		Probate	44
	County Adult Criminal	449		County Adult Criminal	18,229		County Adult Criminal	517
	County Civil**	429		County Civil**	40,172		County Civil**	1,389
		1,723			75,515			2,374
Holmes	Adult Criminal	330	19 Indian River	Adult Criminal	1,080	Hendry	Adult Criminal	528
	Civil	111		Civil	2,042		Civil	384
	Family Court*	379		Family Court*	2,058		Family Court*	702
	Probate	105		Probate	909		Probate	106
	County Adult Criminal	721		County Adult Criminal	3,939		County Adult Criminal	2,901
	County Civil**	1,247		County Civil**	7,385		County Civil**	2,461
		2,893			17,413			7,082
Jackson	Adult Criminal	756	Martin	Adult Criminal	1,233	Lee	Adult Criminal	4,841
	Civil	380		Civil	2,196		Civil	11,104
	Family Court*	895		Family Court*	2,011		Family Court*	9,369
	Probate	301		Probate	785		Probate	2,794
	County Adult Criminal	1,976		County Adult Criminal	6,830		County Adult Criminal	28,267
	County Civil**	4,199		County Civil**	10,324		County Civil**	36,930
		8,507			23,379			93,305
Washington	Adult Criminal	369						
	Civil	371						
	Family Court*	394						
	Probate	109						
	County Adult Criminal	687						
	County Civil**	1,456						
		3,386						

COURT CONTACTS FOR 2013-2014

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

Chief Justice RICKY POLSTON (850) 488-2361
Clerk John A. Tomasino (850) 488-0125
Marshal Silvester Dawson (850) 488-8845
Director of Public Info. Craig Waters (850) 414-7641
Website <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org>

DISTRICT COURTS OF APPEAL

1st DCA

Chief Judge JOSEPH LEWIS, JR. (850) 487-1000
Clerk Jon S. Wheeler (850) 717-8100
Marshal Stephen M. Nevels (850) 717-8130
Website <http://www.1dca.org>

2nd DCA

Chief Judge CHARLES A. DAVIS, JR. (863) 499-2290
Clerk James R. Birkhold (863) 802-6429
Marshal Jo Haynes (863) 802-6400
Website <http://www.2dca.org>

3rd DCA

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

4th DCA

Chief Judge DORIAN DAMOORGIAN (561) 242-2028
Clerk Marilyn Beuttenmuller (561) 242-2000
Marshal Daniel DiGiacomo (561) 242-2000
Website <http://www.4dca.org>

5th DCA

Chief Judge VINCENT G. TORPY, JR. (386) 947-1523
Clerk Pamela R. Masters (386) 255-8600
Marshal Charles Crawford (386) 947-1544
Website <http://www.5dca.org>

CIRCUIT COURTS

1st Judicial Circuit

Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties
Chief Judge TERRY D. TERRELL (850) 595-4464
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 CHARLES A. FRANCIS (850) 577-4306
Court Administrator Grant Slayden (850) 577-4420
Website <http://www.leoncountyfl.gov/2ndCircuit/>

3rd Judicial Circuit

Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor counties
Chief Judge GREGORY S. PARKER (850) 838-3520
Court Administrator Sondra Lanier (386) 758-2163
Website <http://www.jud3.flcourts.org>

4th Judicial Circuit

Clay, Duval, and Nassau counties
Chief Judge DONALD R. MORAN, JR. (904) 255-1228
Court Administrator Joe G. Stelma, Jr. (904) 255-1001
Website <http://www.coj.net/Departments/Fourth+Judicial+Circuit+Court/default.htm>

5th Judicial Circuit

Hernando, Lake, Marion, Citrus, and Sumter counties
Chief Judge DON F. BRIGGS (352) 742-4224
Court Administrator David M. Trammell (352) 401-6701
Website <http://www.circuit5.org>

6th Judicial Circuit

Pasco and Pinellas counties
Chief Judge J. THOMAS MCGRADY (727) 464-7457
Court Administrator Gay Inskeep (727) 582-7477
Website <http://www.jud6.org>

7th Judicial Circuit

Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, and Volusia counties
Chief Judge TERENCE R. PERKINS (386) 257-6071
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 ROBERT ROUNDTREE (352) 374-3644
Court Administrator Ted McFetridge (352) 374-3638
Website <http://www.circuit8.org>

9th Judicial Circuit

Orange and Osceola counties
Chief Judge BELVIN PERRY, JR. (407) 836-2008
Court Administrator Matthew Benefiel (407) 836-2051
Website <http://www.ninthcircuit.org/>

10th Judicial Circuit

Hardee, Highlands, and Polk counties
Chief Judge WILLIAM BRUCE SMITH (863) 534-4653
Court Administrator Nick Sudzina (863) 534-4686
Website <http://www.jud10.flcourts.org/>

11th Judicial Circuit

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

COURT CONTACTS FOR 2013-2014

12th Judicial Circuit

DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties

Chief Judge ANDREW D. OWENS, JR. (941) 861-7946
 Court Administrator Walt Smith (941) 861-7800
 Website <http://www.jud12.flcourts.org/>

13th Judicial Circuit

Hillsborough County

Chief Judge MANUEL MENENDEZ, JR. (813) 272-5022
 Court Administrator Mike Bridenback (813) 272-5894
 Website <http://www.fljud13.org/>

14th Judicial Circuit

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

Chief Judge HENTZ MCCLELLAN (850) 747-5464
 Court Administrator Jan Shadburn (850) 814-6849
 Website <http://www.jud14.flcourts.org>

15th Judicial Circuit

Palm Beach County

Chief Judge JEFFREY COLBATH (561) 355-1721
 Court Administrator Barbara L. Dawicke (561) 355-1872
 Website <http://15thcircuit.co.palm-beach.fl.us/web/guest/cadmin>

16th Judicial Circuit

Monroe County

Chief Judge DAVID J. AUDLIN, JR. (305) 292-3433
 Court Administrator Holly Elomina (305) 295-3644
 Website <http://www.keysCourts.net>

17th Judicial Circuit

Broward County

Chief Judge PETER M. WEINSTEIN (954) 831-5506
 Court Administrator Kathleen R. Pugh (954) 831-7740
 Website <http://www.17th.flcourts.org>

18th Judicial Circuit

Brevard and Seminole counties

Chief Judge JOHN M. HARRIS (321) 617-7288
 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 STEVEN J. LEVIN (772) 223-4827
 Court Administrator Tom Genung (772) 807-4370
 Website <http://www.circuit19.org>

20th Judicial Circuit

Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties

Chief Judge JAY B. ROSMAN (239) 533-9154
 Court Administrator Scott Wilsker (239) 533-1712
 Website <http://www.ca.cjis20.org/home/main/homepage.asp>

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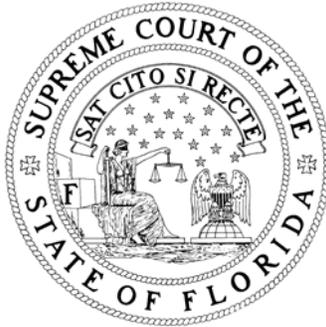
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The 2012-2013 Florida State Courts Annual Report
is published by
The Office of the State Courts Administrator
500 South Duval Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1900

For more information, call
(850) 922-5081
or visit <http://www.flcourts.org>

Under the direction of
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The 2012–2013 Florida State Courts
Annual Report is published by
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