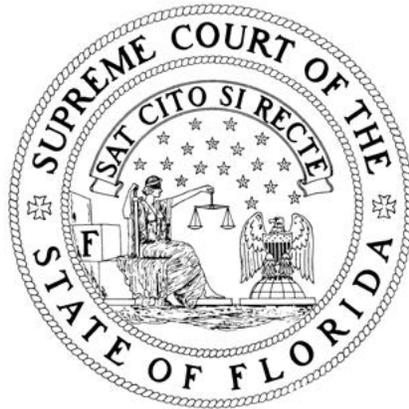




# FLORIDA STATE COURTS

2013-2014

*Annual Report*



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# The Supreme Court of Florida

Annual Report, July 1, 2013—June 30, 2014



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*



Tallahassee has a humid subtropical climate, with long summers and short, temperate winters—although, 32 nights a year, on average, the temperature falls below freezing in the state capital. Snow and ice are rare—but they do periodically visit the city, as illustrated in this photo of the ice-encrusted fountain behind the supreme court building. When weather conditions threaten the building and the people within it, the Court Emergency Management Team turns to its preparedness plan, which includes emergency and administrative procedures as well as a continuity of operations plan.

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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

When I became chief justice, I recognized one of the most significant challenges would be to address the retirement of our Florida State Courts Administrator, Elisabeth H. Goodner. PK Jameson is our new administrator and although she will not attempt to fill Lisa's shoes, she will forge her own way and is very capable to take over the role.

The Florida Supreme Court passed a resolution honoring Lisa's service, and I quote in part:

Lisa has served the Florida Judiciary with diligence, integrity and excellence for nearly a quarter of a century, exemplifying the very highest standards of public service. She has, without fail, met each and every challenge and demand with sound judgment, exceptional leadership and unshakeable calm, vividly impressing and inspiring all who have had the good fortune of working with her or for her.

Lisa's many accomplishments during her 11-year tenure will serve the entire Florida Judiciary well for decades to come, benefitting far into the future the millions of people who turn to this branch of government for the impartial administration of justice and the peaceful resolution of disputes.



On behalf of the Florida Supreme Court, and Florida's Judicial Branch, I thank you Lisa, for all of your years of service to the people of Florida.

It is appropriate that my chief justice remarks serve as an introduction to this message from our Florida State Courts Administrator, Elisabeth H. Goodner.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Andrew Polston". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

I am pleased to play a part in Chief Justice Polston's opening message. I worked with Florida's courts for the last 24 years, 11 of them as state courts administrator, and although these years had their share of strains and stresses, they were also invigorating, rewarding—and always interesting. Looking back, I feel so proud to have helped the branch successfully navigate what many have called our two most complex and arduous challenges in modern history—the implementation of the constitutionally-mandated budgetary unification of the judicial branch (commonly referred to as Revision 7) and the debilitating reductions in judicial branch operating funds and staff positions resulting from the decline in state financial resources during the Great Recession.

I am also honored to have had a role in supporting the many initiatives and innovations our court system developed over the years to enhance our delivery of timely, effective, and fair justice to the people we serve. The 2013 – 2014 fiscal year was an especially productive one for the branch, and it is my pleasure, as one of my final acts as state courts administrator, to be given the opportunity to introduce you to some of the achievements highlighted in this annual report.

One of our most momentous accomplishments is the headway our trial courts have made in reducing the backlog of residential foreclosure cases. Although we started the fiscal year with more than 329,000 foreclosure cases pending in the courts, by the end of the fiscal year, approximately 159,000 were pending. As this annual report describes, our success has two roots: the funding lawmakers appropriated for human resources (i.e., additional senior judge days, general magistrates, and case managers) and for technology enhancements, and

the trial courts' vigorous implementation of numerous practical strategies and process improvements suggested in the branch's *Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan* (which was largely a compilation of practices that had been developed and proven at the local level).

This report also chronicles our progress in developing a comprehensive electronic courts structure. All attorneys with internet access can now file documents electronically through the ePortal, and the Florida Courts E-Filing Authority is currently working to install software that will enable self-represented litigants to file documents electronically as well. We have also been making great strides in our integrated electronic case management initiative, which has two key elements: a web-based application that lets judges review documents that are filed electronically and manage their cases electronically; and a data management component that will lead to better statewide-level court data reporting and help the branch manage its operations and resources more efficiently.



You can also read about the considerable advances being made by our Judicial Management Council. Established in November 2012, the council is focused on improving people's access to justice (the first project it approved is the development of automated, interactive forms for self-represented litigants); fostering communication both within and outside the judicial branch (it is revising the branch's communication plan for the supreme court's consideration); and enhancing the performance and effectiveness of the branch (it is seeking methods to best capture better, more reliable data in order to measure and improve efficiency).

Our problem-solving courts also continue to evolve. Conceived in Florida 25 years ago, drug court spurred a profound change in the way the US responds when a person suffering from substance and/or alcohol abuse is arrested. This year, after releasing a report confirming that diverting prison-bound offenders to drug courts does indeed save tax dollars and reduce recidivism, lawmakers appropriated recurring dollars to continue Florida's Adult Post-Adjudicatory Drug Court Expansion Program (which eight of our counties began piloting five years ago). Also showing great promise are Florida's veterans courts: since 2010, we have launched 21 veterans dockets, and we just received funding to expand the program to two more counties.

This report details many more highlights of the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, but I want to call attention to a milestone about which I'm especially excited. In my early years as state courts administrator, we became aware of pervasive problems with pay inequity for court employees: studies showed that, for comparable work, the judicial branch was paying less than other Florida government entities. Since then, branch leaders have been advocating for fair and equitable pay—and, in this year's legislative session, lawmakers responded, appropriating recurring dollars for a raise for targeted court personnel to address salary equity, retention, and recruitment issues. This is a huge step, and it means so much to me that these years of judicial branch effort bore fruit before I retired.

I want to emphasize that none of these accomplishments could have come to pass without the diligence and dedication of the men and women who work in Florida's judiciary. It has been an honor to serve with you these 24 years.

My term as state courts administrator came to an end on June 30, 2014—the same day that Justice Polston's two-year term as chief came to a close. But annual reports don't only reflect on endings—they also gesture toward beginnings. And we just marked two very important ones: Jorge Labarga is our new chief justice, and PK Jameson just stepped into the role of state courts administrator. I have full confidence that Ms Jameson will keep OSCA on its path to ever-greater heights and that our courts and our state will be very well-served with Chief Justice Labarga as our judicial leader.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Goodman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# 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 10 grandchildren.

## **R. Fred Lewis** *Justice*

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

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



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

# FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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

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

## **Peggy A. Quince** *Justice*

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

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



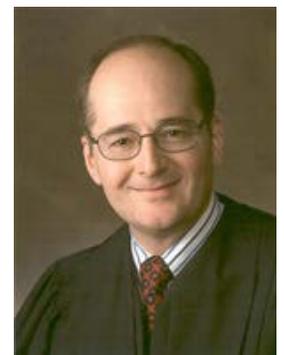
Justice Quince has been active in many civic and community organizations, including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Jack and Jill of America, the Urban League, the NAACP, and The Links, Inc. She has also received numerous awards, especially for her work on behalf of girls, women, minorities, civil rights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

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

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

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

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



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

# FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

## **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. On June 30, 2014, he was sworn in as the fifty-sixth chief justice of Florida.

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***

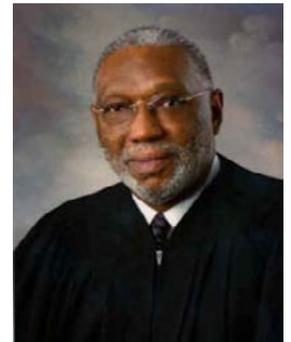
Justice Perry was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in March 2009.

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, 2013 – June 30, 2014: The Year in Review

During his two-year term as the judicial branch's chief administrative officer, which extended from July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2014, Chief Justice Ricky Polston regularly asserted that adequate funding for the state courts system was his greatest priority, first underscoring this emphasis at his passing of the gavel ceremony: "It will be most important to make sure the train is running and running on time. To do that, we need budget resources," he said. Happily, the economy began showing nascent signs of recovery during his first year in office, and, as a result, the court system started experiencing greater revenue stability. Then, as Chief Justice Polston headed into the second year of his term, Florida looked forward to its first budget surplus in six years. Fiscally, the 2013 – 2014 fiscal year was a good year for the state. And, as this report will demonstrate, it was a positive year for the judicial branch as well.

Throughout his term, regardless of the relative fragility or stability of the judicial branch coffers, the chief justice maintained that his role was "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, adding that, "without this public trust, confidence in the courts inevitably would be diminished."

The *2013 – 2014 Florida State Courts Annual Report* illustrates the ways in which the judicial branch has aspired to be a good steward of the resources it has been given and to earn the trust and confidence of the people it serves. These efforts are categorized in consonance with the five long-range issues of the *Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch*. The 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 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.***

In an era of increased workloads and fluctuating resources, Florida's judicial branch is especially cognizant of the need to govern itself effectively and efficiently—a goal that depends, in part, on having revenues that are sufficient to support its legislatively-authorized budget. To achieve these objectives, branch leaders continue to work tirelessly to stabilize court funding and to develop a more efficient governance structure for making decisions and setting policy for the courts system.

#### State Courts System Funding

##### Brief History of Court Funding

Until 2009, the state courts system depended almost exclusively on general revenue funding to support court operations. So when the economy was hardy, sales tax and property revenues grew, and the state's general revenue flourished, giving rise to a healthy court budget. When the economy was lean, every entity that depended on state funding—including the courts system—felt the effects. Indeed, during the gravest stretch of the recent economic downturn, when the state's general revenue fund plunged dramatically (from fiscal years 2007 – 08 through 2008 – 09), the court budget suffered a 12 percent reduction that resulted in the elimination of nearly 300 staff positions, a hiring and travel freeze, a reduction in the number of judicial education programs, and a suspension in the work of numerous court committees.



Just as court services were being reduced or eliminated, citizens and businesses were turning to the courts in greater numbers—as is typical in times of economic dis-ease. At the same time, foreclosure cases began coming in at historical

levels, causing a spike in backlogged foreclosure cases; this had both direct and indirect economic ramifications, further imperiling Florida's already delicate financial state. To ensure the timely administration of justice and to safeguard the viability of the court system, branch leaders began advocating the adoption of budgeting practices that would better stabilize the operations of the courts during times of fiscal crisis.

In January 2009, to protect the courts from further reductions in budget and personnel through periods of economic distress, lawmakers established the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund, which they bolstered with higher filing fees and some fine revenues. With the creation of this dedicated funding source for the branch, the courts shifted from being primarily general revenue-funded to being primarily trust-funded (e.g., 70 percent trust-funded in 2009 – 10, and 90 percent trust-funded in 2010 – 11 and 2011 – 12). Then in spring 2009, as foreclosure filings were reaching unprecedented heights, the legislature designated foreclosure filing fees

as the principal source of revenue for the trust fund. However, this shift rendered the judicial branch budget vulnerable to volatility beyond its control. This vulnerability became especially pronounced in October 2010, when foreclosure filings, which had grown to average more than 30,000 per month, fell to under 9,000 per month. Inevitably, this prodigious drop in filings caused a huge shortfall in the trust fund, and when trust fund revenue was insufficient to support the branch's appropriated budget, the chief justice had to secure emergency funding from the governor and legislature.

To restore revenue stability to the state courts system, the legislature adopted a different approach in spring 2012: given the unpredictable swings in mortgage foreclosure filings, lawmakers decided to direct most of these filing fees away from the court system's trust fund and into the state's general revenue fund (which, because of its size, can better withstand the swings) and to return to using general revenue as the primary funding source for the courts. Since fiscal year 2012 – 13, the court system's budget comprises more than 75 percent general revenue, with the remainder coming from the State Courts Revenue Trust Fund.

Even with this return to being predominantly general revenue-funded, however, the judicial branch continues to experience some fiscal instability: trust fund revenue remains reliant on erratic funding streams and is therefore often insufficient to support the branch's authorized appropriations. Branch leaders continue to work with the legislature on a long-term solution to ensure stable funding to meet the needs of the users of the courts system. (Note: Florida's courts typically generate about \$1 billion a year, which is considerably more than what the branch needs to support court operations. However, a significant share of these revenues is used to fund the clerks and non-court state entities and programs. [To learn more about court funding and courts system appropriations, take this link.](#))

## Funding for the 2013 – 14 Fiscal Year

Florida, and Florida's courts, entered the July 2013 – June 2014 fiscal year in relatively sound shape: with slow, but steady signs of recovery from the Great Recession, the state enjoyed its first budget surplus in six years, and lawmakers were able to address several of the branch's most critical needs.

Altogether, the courts received \$443.4 million for the fiscal year [note: this figure includes \$4.6 million for pass through/legislative (member) project funding not sought in the judicial branch's legislative budget request as well as \$16.5 million in nonrecurring funds]. From Florida's share of the national mortgage settlement, the legislature directed \$21.3 million to the courts system to address the foreclosure backlog (\$16 million for senior judges, general magistrates, and case managers, and \$5.3 million for technology enhancements to support their efforts). Lawmakers also provided funding for several critical technology projects (e.g., completing the rewrite of the Judicial Inquiry System and securing technical support to advance the Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution). Also included was funding to continue the eight post-adjudicatory drug court pilot projects and to establish veterans courts in five counties. The budget also contained appropriations to rectify several critical facility problems (a new roof for the supreme court building and various maintenance and repair projects for the DCA courthouses).

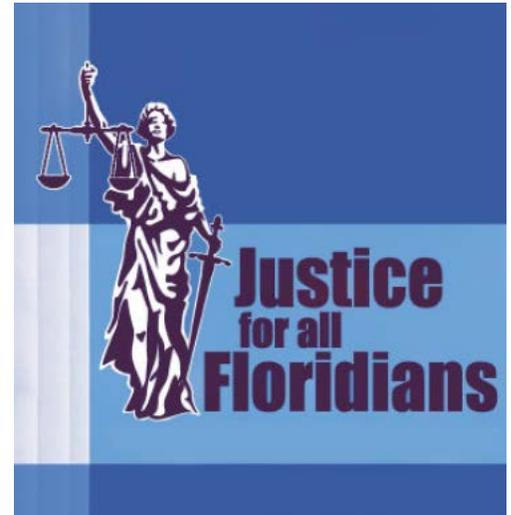


Chief Justice Polston discusses court funding issues with judicial branch leaders.

Although the branch's top priority—a 3.5 percent salary adjustment for all court employees—did not receive funding, all state employees received an across-the-board pay increase (this was the first pay increase since 2006); judges and justices received this pay increase as well—and the legislature also restored the 2 percent salary reduction that affected them in 2009.

### Funding for the 2014 – 15 Fiscal Year

This year, the legislature was working with a surplus once again, so it was another beneficial year for the state and for the judicial branch. In its legislative budget request for fiscal year 2014 – 15, the judicial branch pressed for adequate funding for its “people, places, and tools,” and lawmakers responded to this call. The courts system received \$501.6 million for the fiscal year [note: this figure includes \$24.2 million for pass through/legislative (member) project funding not sought in the judicial branch's legislative budget request; \$23.6 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$33.3 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to fiscal year 2013 – 14 increased costs in employee benefits]. The budget included funding for three new DCA judgeships, for a new courthouse for the Fourth DCA, and for maintenance, repairs, and some security issues at the Second, Third, and Fifth DCAs. Problem-solving courts also received funding: after a successful five-year pilot, the adult post-adjudicatory expansion drug courts were appropriated recurring dollars; funding was also earmarked for training for judges and court employees who work in problem-solving court dockets, for establishing veterans courts in two additional counties, and for sustaining the mental health diversion program in Miami-Dade.



The branch's number one priority again this year was employee pay. And while court employees did not receive the 3.5 percent across-the-board competitive salary adjustment sought by the branch, the legislature's budget package included \$8.1 million in recurring dollars for a raise for targeted court personnel to address salary equity, retention, and recruitment issues.

Said State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner, “We are very pleased with the funding that the legislature provided and the fact that they addressed a number of our most critical issues and highest priorities.”

### Judicial Management Council

For more than six decades, the judicial branch has benefitted from the guidance of its judicial management councils (JMCs), which have been described as high-level management consultants to the supreme court. Established in November 2012, the current JMC—which is the supreme court's fifth—grew out of a recommendation of the Judicial Branch Governance Study Group, created by the supreme court in 2009 to offer suggestions for ways 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 imagined the reauthorized JMC as a “forward-looking advisory body to deftly assist the chief justice and the supreme court in proactively identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and means to address them.” ([To read about the Judicial Branch Study Group, follow this link.](#)) The council's first chair, Chief Justice Ricky Polston, refers to the JMC as the “headlights of the branch, shining a high beam toward the future.”

The council has 15 voting members: two justices (the current chief and another justice), three DCA judges, three circuit court judges, three county court judges, and four public members (two of whom must be Florida Bar members); the state courts administrator serves as a non-voting member. And it has five areas of responsibility: to identify potential crisis situations affecting the branch and develop strategies for addressing them; to identify and evaluate information that will assist in improving the performance and effectiveness of the branch; to develop and monitor progress related to the branch's long-rang planning efforts; to review the charges of the various court and Florida Bar commissions and

committees with an eye toward coordinating, and, if suitable, consolidating these bodies; and to address other issues the court brings before it.

The JMC, which meets at least quarterly, had its inaugural meeting in January 2013, and, based on the council’s charges and on the issues raised by members at that meeting, the chief justice formed three workgroups: the Access to Justice Workgroup, the Performance Workgroup, and the Education and Outreach Workgroup; each member was invited to identify a preference for serving on one. Since then, workgroup members have been making meaningful progress in addressing their responsibilities.

The Access to Justice Workgroup responds to the JMC’s first charge: to identify potential crisis situations affecting the branch and develop strategies to address them. Its first project was to develop an implementation plan for web-based, interactive forms—giving priority to family law forms—to facilitate self-represented litigants’ access to the courts. Since receiving approval for this proposal from the supreme court in April 2014, the workgroup has been developing the plan with the input of various stakeholder groups. The workgroup also identified the problem of declining financial resources for legal aid providers that have traditionally relied on Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts funds, and, in addition to monitoring the implementation of interactive forms, will, in the coming year, turn attention toward this issue.



Judicial Management Council member Justice Labarga shares some ideas at a recent council meeting.

The Performance Workgroup addresses the JMC’s second charge: to identify and evaluate information that will assist in improving the performance and effectiveness of the branch. Its first project was a detailed review of filing and disposition trends by case type and level of court; then the chief justice asked it to turn its attention to available time to disposition data. After synthesizing and interpreting these trends and data, the workgroup will develop recommendations about how to meet future branch needs for uniform and consistent data reporting and analysis in some critical performance areas; it expects to present its recommendations to the court in late 2014 or early 2015.



The Education and Outreach Workgroup focuses on issues connected to communication within and outside of the judicial branch, public trust and confidence, and the expression of clear unification of purpose within the branch. This workgroup has been thinking strategically about organizational identity and image—and about ways to coordinate messages to create and sustain a consistent character and presence. The workgroup’s first project

was to update the branch-wide communication plan; the original plan concentrated largely on external communications, but the plan currently in development is expected to substantially address internal branch communications as well. Preliminarily approved by the JMC, the plan is being circulated throughout the court system for feedback; the revised plan will be submitted to the court for approval in early 2015.

Early in the 2014 – 15 fiscal year, the JMC appointed an additional workgroup: the Long Range Strategic Planning Workgroup will oversee the branch’s long-range planning process, culminating in the revision of the *Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch*.

On July 1, 2014, when he became chief justice, Jorge Labarga took the helm as JMC chair; the Florida Rules of Judicial Administration (2.225) stipulate that JMC membership include a second supreme court justice, and the new chief justice invited Justice Polston to continue his service on the council.

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

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

Based on preliminary data for fiscal year 2013 – 14, approximately 3.4 million complaints and petitions were filed in the state’s trial and appellate courts. During that same period, Florida’s courts, utilizing a variety of dispute resolution methods (including diversion, mediation, plea, and adjudication by trial), disposed of approximately 3.7 million cases ranging 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 daunting tasks, even under fiscally steady circumstances. During the six-year stretch when Florida, like the rest of the nation, was straining through the global recession, the challenges were, at times, staggering. Nevertheless, through periods of fiscal hardship—and through seasons of economic recovery and vigor—the judicial branch remains committed to cultivating methods for administering justice as efficiently as possible. During the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, these efforts included advances in the court system’s performance and accountability initiatives, its technology modernization projects, its family court and problem-solving court endeavors, and its alternative dispute resolution practices. In addition, since implementing its Mortgage Foreclosure Reduction Initiative, the branch has made significant headway in reducing the backlogged cases while ensuring that the rights of the parties involved in litigation are protected.

### Performance and Accountability

In the late 90s, the branch’s Judicial Management Council established the Committee on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability and the Committee on Trial Court Performance and Accountability to enhance the performance of Florida’s courts and to improve their ability to be accountable to the people. In 2002, in response to the increasing workload demands on these committees, the supreme court detached them from the Judicial Management Council, establishing them as separate commissions.

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 capable and effective 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

The Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability continues to monitor the processing of juvenile dependency and termination of parental rights cases. These efforts began in 2005, when then Chief Justice Barbara Pariente directed the commission to review appeals of these cases with an eye toward improving the timeliness of dispositions and thereby minimizing the harm to the children affected by these sensitive family proceedings. In 2006, the commission submitted its report and recommendations, entitled *Delay in Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Cases*, to the supreme court; the court then directed the commission to propose timelines and rule changes that would expedite these cases. The commission filed a supplemental report the following year, and, in 2009, the court adopted timeframes in these matters and charged the commission with monitoring the management of these cases.



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

The DCAs developed statistical reports in order to review eight median timeframes related to filing, transmitting the record, and case processing milestones, all important to monitor throughout the cycle of a dependency appeal. Some of these timeframes are within the courts' direct control, and others are dependent on the parties and lower court processes. In 2011, and again in 2014, the commission released a *Performance Monitoring Report: Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Appeals*, providing a review of findings for each district court in meeting the eight timeframes. In addition to demonstrating continued improvements in most of the timeframes, both reports showed that all the district courts consistently meet four of the eight timeframes as well as the overall performance goal of 195 median days from final judgment (lower tribunal data rendered) to final disposition. The Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability has noted areas in need of improvement in four of the interim timeframes. The commission notes that these timeframes involve the receipt of documents such as the record and briefs and may be caused by factors at the lower tribunal or with appellate counsel.

To address this concern, the supreme court directed the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability to establish a joint study to identify

the issues that cause delays in the receipt of documents at the appellate level and to determine processes that may alleviate the issues and expedite the receipt of the documents. A seven-member joint workgroup has been formed; chaired by Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit, the workgroup expects to submit a final report to the supreme court by December 2015.

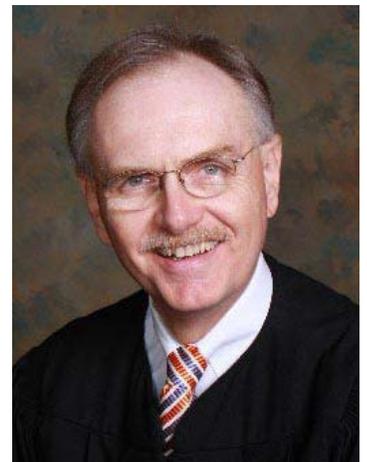
In another joint effort, the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability and the DCA Budget Commission have been collaborating on the development of a resource allocation model for district court staff resources—i.e., central staff attorneys, law clerks, judicial assistants, clerk's office personnel, and marshal's office personnel. For its first task, the Joint Workgroup on Model Staffing Levels identified best practices for central staff attorneys, completing that project in December 2012. Since then, the workgroup has been considering developing a methodology to determine central staff attorney workload.

In addition, the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability began a review of judicial workload trends of the district courts—a process that the DCAs are required by court rule to perform every four years. The commission is now pursuing a judicial survey to update the relative case weights for judicial workload that were established in 2006.

### Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability

The Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability continues to explore strategies for moving cases more efficiently and effectively through the trial court process. A significant milestone was reached in December 2012, when, after a concerted, two-year effort, this commission, together with the Florida Courts Technology Commission and the Court Statistics and Workload Committee, submitted *The Trial Court Integrated Management Solution (TIMS)* report to the supreme court. Ambitious in scope, this report offered a framework for a standardized, statewide, integrated data management solution for capturing and reporting case and court activity information for use both at the circuit and statewide levels. ([Take this link to the TIMS report.](#)) The report spurred the development of an integrated electronic case management initiative called the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System (ITCAS), currently in the conceptual stage. The initiative has two key elements.

First is the judicial viewer. Consisting of workstations and software, this interactive application enables judges to view and work on electronic documents and to manage their cases electronically from any location and across many devices; it also provides judges with basic tools and capabilities at the local level to manage and track case activity. Currently, the majority of circuits are using judicial viewers to assist with moving their backlogged foreclosure cases.



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

The second element of the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System is called the Judicial Data Management Services project, which the judicial branch is currently seeking funding to develop. This project involves a state-level data management strategy that will pull court activity data from multiple sources and integrate them into a coherent whole.

*Another major technology initiative in which the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability has been involved is the use of remote interpreting systems to minimize staffing costs of expanding interpreting resources. Florida continues to experience significant growth in its non-English speaking population—a trend also reflected in the courts—and the judicial branch has been taking steps to improve its ability to handle cases and other matters involving parties or witnesses who have limited English proficiency. These efforts include expanding the use of technology to improve efficiencies.*

Ultimately, the data it provides will enable courts to improve because they will be able to measure adjudicatory outcomes and evaluate their efficiency; will increase operational efficiency through the deft use of shared resources; and will support organizational priorities through legislative resource and budgetary requests.

Historically, because 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, court data collection systems across the state have developed independently of one another, without uniform principles or strategies—resulting in significant challenges to case management and summary reporting systems. The Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System, founded on an integrated approach to data management, holds out great promise for better management of cases, better statewide-level court data reporting, and improved performance generally.

Another major technology initiative in which the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability has been involved is the use of remote interpreting systems to minimize staffing costs of expanding interpreting resources. Florida continues to experience significant growth in its non-English speaking population—a trend also reflected in the courts—and the judicial branch has been taking steps to improve its ability to handle cases and other matters involving parties or witnesses who have limited English proficiency. These efforts include expanding the use of technology to improve efficiencies.

Several Florida courts are already using audio and video technology to provide interpreting services remotely within a circuit; this is referred to as the “circuit model.” Over the last few years, the branch has been working to develop what it calls the “regional model,” a more advanced remote interpreting solution that envisions sharing interpreting resources among different circuits. The regional model includes a state-level call manager (to manage shared services) and has the potential to provide judges with an online statewide registry of available staff and/or contractual interpreters to obtain interpreting services on demand. Benefits of the regional model include the elimination of travel, improved efficiency in case processing, improved effectiveness in the delivery of interpreting services, and increased opportunity to share interpreter resources among circuits and with other states.

In 2010, several circuits began preliminary explorations of a regional model pilot. Then for fiscal year 2013 – 14, the branch received funding to expand the piloting efforts of the regional model: the Seventh, Ninth, Fourteenth, and Sixteenth Circuits are now sharing remote interpreting resources, and OSCA is housing the call manager. A joint workgroup with crossover membership from the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability, the Due Process Technology Workgroup, and the Court Interpreter Certification Board will make recommendations to the supreme court on the business processes for the regional model.

Finally, the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability is responsible for developing and implementing the best practices model for the major elements of the trial courts. This effort is in keeping with the long-range issue #2 of the

strategic plan, which recommends that the branch “continue to develop and institutionalize performance and accountability management systems that implement best practices in resource management.” In the past, the commission addressed standards of operation and best practices for alternative dispute resolution, court reporting, and court interpreting. In June 2014, the commission submitted a report to the supreme court describing a comprehensive framework for expert witness operations. Among the topics covered in *Recommendations for the Provision of Expert Witness Services in Florida’s Trial Courts* are assignment of services, management practices, judicial appointments/mentoring, education, funding/payment, data collection/monitoring, and suggested statutory and rule revisions.

## Technology

To support their day-to-day operations, Florida’s courts rely increasingly on information technology. Indeed, information technology plays an elemental role in most every area of court business—including electronic filing, case management, document management and imaging, workflow management, digital court reporting, remote court interpreting, and public internet access to court-related materials and information.

In fiscal year 2013 – 14, the judicial branch continued to make strides toward its goal of developing a comprehensive electronic courts structure. This enterprise 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 electronic access to the courts. Through these and other technology modernization endeavors, the judicial branch italicizes its commitment to improving the efficiency of, and access to, the court system.

## Florida Courts Technology Commission

Established in 1995 under the direction of the supreme court, the Florida Courts Technology Commission (originally 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 establishes the technology policies and standards by which all court committees and workgroups must abide.

To address its extensive responsibilities, the commission creates committees, subcommittees, and workgroups, assigning specific tasks to each. When a task is completed, the entity that oversaw its implementation is dissolved; such is the case with the E-Filing Committee, which was recently sunset after all Florida counties had been approved to accept electronically-filed documents through the statewide e-portal. And when the commission takes on a new task, it creates an additional body to address it; a recent example is the Access Governance Board, established to develop and maintain a consistent statewide electronic access model and policy and to monitor the electronic records access systems for which clerks of court are seeking approval.



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

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

## E-Filing

E-filing refers to the electronic delivery of court records and supporting documents from lawyers and litigants to the clerks of court. E-filing reduces costs for the courts, clerks, and court users; improves case processing and case management; and enhances users’ courtroom experience and their access to the courts without significantly increasing their costs to use the courts.

The judicial branch has been working to automate the process for filing court documents since 1979, when the supreme court adopted its first rules governing e-filing (for filing by fax). In 2008, the legislature 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 was directed to set the standards, and the court adopted them in 2009. ([Take this link to the \*Standards for Electronic Access to the Courts.\*](#)) Not long after, the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers association reported that it had created an electronic portal—a statewide website for the secure electronic transmission of court records to and from the Florida courts—that the branch could use. Together, the supreme court and clerks established the Florida Courts E-Filing Authority: the public entity that owns the portal, makes its business decisions, and is responsible for designing, developing, implementing, operating, upgrading, supporting, and maintaining the portal in keeping with the branch’s e-filing standards.



After the branch and clerks of court addressed the necessary technical matters for e-filing (e.g., creating data envelopes for each of the 10 trial court divisions, developing and receiving approval for each county’s e-filing plans, and building an interface between each circuit court and the portal), the portal went live: files began coming through the portal in early January 2011. ([This link goes to the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal.](#))

Now, all 67 counties can accept filings through the portal—as can the supreme court and the Second DCA. And the number of registered users continues to rise steadily. As of September 1, 2014, the portal has more than 65,000 registered users—among them, attorneys (who are required to file through the portal), judges, and pro se litigants. Soon, court reporters, mediators, process servers, law enforcement, state agencies, mental health professionals, and similar entities will also be able to file court documents through the portal. And portal traffic continues to get heavier: on an average weekday, the portal conveys more than 52,000 electronic submissions. According to former clerk of the supreme court Tom Hall, who advises the E-Filing Authority and county court clerks on e-filing issues, Florida is one of a very few states that are “attempting a total, top-to-bottom e-filing system”—adding that Florida also has one of the most advanced and least trouble-ridden systems among them.

### Appellate Court Technology Pilots

E-filing is just one of many automated court processes that the judicial branch is implementing as it migrates to a comprehensive electronic courts structure. Keeping its sight on the bigger picture while laying the groundwork for appellate e-filing, the judicial branch has been working to develop software applications that will enable the seamless integration of e-filing with other judicial processes—such as case management, document management, and workflow management. Since June 2010, the appellate courts have been participating in two pilot projects 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, was piloted in the supreme court (which has been using eFACTS since June 2012) and the Second DCA (which has been using it since August 2013). It 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; facilitates the logical organization of the documents and automatically inputs the data into its case management system; and enables users to locate, retrieve, and work on the documents they need, when they need them. eFACTS also utilizes SharePoint’s collaboration tools to enable multiple users to view and modify the same documents simultaneously, keeping track of the different versions created by different users. Other features 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 access documents easily and securely at their convenience.

In addition, eFACTS accommodates electronic filing through the portal. Attorneys have been required to e-file documents through the portal to the supreme court since April 1, 2013, and to the Second DCA since October 1, 2013. Both courts have been accepting transmittals from the lower tribunals through the portal since June 30, 2014.

The other appellate courts technology system, called iDCA/eDCA, was originally 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 involves three closely linked sites: Internal DCA (iDCA), an internal component for document management for use by judges and law clerks; External DCA (eDCA), a portal for the transmittal of all filings with the court (this site 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. iDCA/eDCA is successfully deployed at the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth DCAs.

Currently, eFACTS is running parallel with iDCA/eDCA at the Third, Fourth, and Fifth DCAs, so these courts have begun to explore the eFACTS features. Soon, the First DCA will also have the ability to try eFACTS. In the meantime, based on feedback from the newly-added DCAs, Information Systems Services staff are tweaking eFACTS to accommodate the needs and preferences of the new users, and staff are also tailoring eFACTS to provide some of the valued capabilities of iDCA/eDCA. After certain features for e-filing and document access are added, these four district courts will gradually transition over to eFACTS. At that point, all the appellate courts will be using eFACTS and accepting filings through the portal.

## Electronic Access to the Courts

The term *e-filing* literally refers to the electronic transmission of court records to the Florida courts. However, it actually signifies the more ambitious goal of electronic access to the courts—that is, the use of information technologies to enhance the accessibility of the courts. Electronic access includes the many automated processes that make the courts more open to and reachable by all users—judges, court personnel, and clerks of court; attorneys, self-represented litigants, and other parties; justice system partners and other user groups; and the public. While advancing toward the full implementation of statewide e-filing, the judicial branch has kept its focus on the more universal object of electronic access to the courts.

One of its most steadfast goals has been to establish an apparatus for providing remote access to court records while protecting people’s privacy rights. Since 2003, with the creation of the supreme court’s Committee on Privacy and Court Records, the branch has been directing considerable efforts toward developing the infrastructure and policies necessary to protect and curtail confidential and sensitive information in court records while establishing the means for providing public access to non-confidential court records. Among these efforts was the adoption, in 2007, of a limited moratorium on access to electronic court records to address concerns about sensitive and confidential information contained therein. [\(To read the 2007 Interim Policy on Electronic Release of Court Records, follow this link.\)](#)



In addition, the court has adopted rules and amendments to minimize the presence of sensitive and confidential information in court records, to require filers to identify and safeguard confidential information in their pleadings, and to require the automatic redaction of a standard list of 20 statutory public records exemptions by the clerks of court.

In May 2014, the supreme court took the next logical step toward responsible public access to electronic court records. As recommended by the Florida Courts Technology Commission, the supreme court adopted the *Standards for Access to Electronic Court Records* and the *Access Security Matrix*. Together, these documents provide a carefully-structured mechanism to facilitate appropriate, differentiated levels of access to court records to judges, to court and clerks office personnel, and to members of the general public and user groups with specialized credentials; the standards and matrix are based on a model developed by the Manatee County Clerk of Court for a pilot program that operated under supreme court oversight from 2007 – 2011. Both are living documents that will continue to be modified as statutes, rules, and administrative orders are revised or issued. [\(Follow this link to Standards for Access to Electronic Court Records.\)](#)

To ensure that sufficient security measures are in place, clerks of court who seek to make court records electronically accessible must file an application with the court. The Florida Courts Technology Commission is responsible for reviewing and approving (or not) each application. Once approval is given, the clerk must participate in a 90-day pilot program that monitors and coordinates all established clerk initiatives relating to online access to electronic court records. After participating in the pilot, the clerk can submit a letter to the Florida Courts Technology Commission seeking approval to go into a full production system.

In another endeavor to support electronic access to the courts, OSCA launched a major redesign of the [flcourts.org](http://flcourts.org) website, which hadn't been rebuilt since 2004. Under the direction of State Courts Administrator Lisa Goodner, the web team charged with spearheading the project reorganized the content to more clearly and usefully meet the needs of the various audiences that visit the site (judges, court employees, justice system partners, court users, the media, and others seeking information about Florida's courts). The result is a contemporary-looking website that is distinctly more user-friendly and more accessible, both to users of auxiliary aids as well as to users with mobile devices. Several months after the launch, the Forum on the Advancement of Court Technology (a special committee of the National Association for Court Management) recognized OSCA with a 2014 Top 10 Court Websites Award, commending OSCA's efforts "to improve access to justice and efficiencies to the court's business through its use of technology." Judges praised the "well organized navigation" of the site and described it as "visually appealing."



OSCA was named a 2014 Top 10 Websites Award Winner for its recently re-designed [flcourts.org](http://flcourts.org) website. The award was conferred by the Forum on the Advancement of Court Technology (FACT); pictured here is the electronic web badge signaling the award.

### Behind the Scenes

Meanwhile, working unobtrusively in the background, the court system's Information Systems Support Services Team (ISS) plays a critical role in supporting court operations in all 93 courts statewide. Housed in OSCA, ISS is a "24 x 7 x 365 service provider" responsible for supplying and maintaining reliable computer operations for desktops, servers, data storage, disaster recovery, security, mobile devices, phone support, teleconferencing, audio visual, and all related networking infrastructure.

Among its accomplishments in the 2013–14 fiscal year, ISS Support Services provided network architecture, implementation, and support for the statewide remote interpreting project; installed virtual servers at the supreme court, the DCAs, and OSCA, allowing for enhanced continuity of operations, disaster recovery, device consolidation, and energy savings; provided on-site deployment, training, and assistance for the supreme court, DCAs, and OSCA with a desktop PC upgrade; and carried out multiple system enhancements, upgrades, and new product rollouts (enhancements replaced outdated hardware, software, and networking equipment and increased data storage capacity; and infrastructure upgrades included new desktops, servers, local and wide area networking appliances, storage area networks, wireless services, and remote interpretation systems and also allowed for the statewide expansion of e-filing and platform configuration in preparation for the upcoming version upgrade of the Judicial Inquiry System).

### 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. The judicial branch, since launching its first family court initiative in 1988, has worked with its federal, state, and community partners to develop comprehensive, integrated approaches to handling these delicate matters. 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; information about Florida's drug courts, veterans courts, and mental health initiatives is included in the following article, on problem-solving courts.)

Established in 1994, the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (originally called the Family Court Steering Committee) pioneers judicial branch efforts to improve the court process for families and children. Chaired by Justice Barbara Pariente, this 23-member body of judges, quasi-judicial officers, and justice system partners provides guidance and support to courts around the state, helping to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of family court operations.

A pressing concern of the steering committee is a phenomenon that has come to be called the "school-to-prison pipeline." To address this matter, in fiscal year 2013 – 14, the steering committee collaborated with the Florida Department of

Education to develop an online School-Justice Partnership toolkit. The toolkit is conceived as an ongoing vehicle to develop partnerships among the judiciary, school district officials, and juvenile justice stakeholders in each county to help court-involved children stay in school and out of court. Largely modelled after the Palm Beach County School-Justice Partnership, the toolkit suggests the adoption of practices like a model discipline code, school liaisons in the courtroom, and juvenile probation officers stationed in schools. The steering committee introduced the toolkit at the joint conference of school boards and school board superintendents in June 2014 and is now encouraging courts to work with local school boards to implement toolkit practices in an effort to ensure that children involved in family court cases stay in school and are less likely to be arrested, suspended, or expelled. ([This link goes to the Florida School-Justice website.](#))



Justice Barbara J. Pariente, who chairs the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court, talks with members about strategies for addressing the phenomenon referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

At the request of the supreme court, the steering committee also examined the judicial notice provisions in chapter 741, Florida Statutes (dealing with marriage; domestic violence) and determined that amendments were needed, proposing language to the supreme court for inclusion in its legislative agenda. In short, the steering committee proposed that when imminent danger to people or property is alleged in a pending case, it could be impractical to notify the parties of the intent to take judicial notice. Therefore, the opportunity to present evidence relevant to the appropriateness of taking judicial notice could be deferred for up to two business days after judicial action has been taken. The court approved the language, and lawmakers approved the change during their 2014 legislative session.

Another of the steering committee’s responsibilities is to provide assistance to the judicial branch’s statewide, multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel, which was established in 2009 by then Chief Justice Peggy Quince to improve courtroom practice and decision-making in dependency cases. The panel was created in response to a federal Child and Family Services Review that discovered a number of shortcomings in Florida’s child welfare system; while the Department of Children and Families is responsible for addressing most of the deficiencies, the court system, through the Dependency Court Improvement Panel, has been taking concurrent action to improve dependency court.

The Dependency Panel, chaired by Judge Katherine G. Essrig, Thirteenth Circuit, and supported by OSCA’s Office of Court Improvement, is focused on improving the stability, safety, and emotional well-being of children involved in Florida’s court system. In fiscal year 2013 – 14, the panel made significant headway on three initiatives: evidence-based parenting, transition planning, and safety methodology.

Since 2013, in response to questions regarding parental access to quality services, the panel has been working diligently to implement evidence-based parenting programs. Derived from the best research evidence and clinical experience, evidence-based practices are scientifically evaluated and proven to produce positive results. In addition to encouraging parenting providers to offer evidence-based programs, the Dependency Panel is striving to help providers develop effective ways to convey information on parental progress to the judges and magistrates in the courtroom. An example of an evidence-based parenting practice would be the use of pre- and post-tests to evaluate participants’ parenting skills; these tests indicate whether, and how, parents have improved and help judges determine whether children can be safely reunited with their parents. Currently, 13 circuits have begun work on this initiative and are receiving targeted technical assistance. By encouraging the use of evidence-based practices in parenting programs, the Dependency Panel seeks to ensure better outcomes for children.

The Dependency Panel has also continued its work on transition planning for children in the child welfare system. When foster children are moved from one home to another without the benefit of sufficient transition planning, the disruptions

that follow can affect visitation with family members, educational progress, medical appointments, and the availability of services—factors that can re-traumatize the children. To address this issue, the panel requested that the chief judge of each circuit identify someone who could serve as a judicial sponsor for that circuit; the judicial sponsors are bringing awareness of the issue to the other judges and stakeholders in their circuit and are leading training efforts aimed at improving the transition process.

Another initiative on which the Dependency Panel has been concentrating is the Florida Safety Methodology, a new child welfare practice model that emphasizes the engagement and empowerment of the parents and utilizes a standardized approach to safety decision-making and risk assessment to achieve child safety. The Dependency Panel has been working closely with the Department of Children and Families to ensure that the judiciary is informed about safety decision-making.

Meanwhile, to help judges, magistrates, court personnel, and stakeholders stay abreast of Florida's numerous dependency court resources and developments, OSCA's Office of Court Improvement publishes its quarterly *Dependency Outlook* newsletter, which covers local and statewide dependency initiatives, promising practices, dependency court events, and training opportunities. ([Take this link to the \*Dependency Outlook\* newsletter.](#)) The Office of Court Improvement is also updating the *Dependency Benchbook*, a user-friendly reference guide that includes state and national laws, rules of court, and family-centered bench practices, such as using science-informed visitation protocols, involving children in court, ensuring concurrent planning, addressing paternity, addressing child support, and recognizing the need for trauma-informed treatment. ([This link goes to the 2012 \*Dependency Benchbook\*.](#))



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

In addition to making significant progress in the dependency division of family court, the branch developed some critical resources for the domestic violence division during the 2013 – 14 fiscal year.

Domestic violence cases involve many different groups, e.g., law enforcement, judges, state attorneys, public defenders, court staff, advocates, probation officers, and other professionals in the domestic violence field. For this multi-faceted, highly complex system to operate effectively—and to ensure victim safety, to protect the due process rights of all parties, and to hold perpetrators accountable—a coordinated community response is essential: judges, court staff, and stakeholders must be well-informed about all the components of the process and must work together to assist families in accessing resources and navigating the court system. To support this effort, the Office of Court Improvement set out to identify and prioritize domestic violence issues in Florida's court system and to develop a long-range plan to address those issues. Elements of this ambitious feat included court observations, surveys tailored to each of the various stakeholder groups, the establishment of a Domestic Violence Advisory Group comprising professionals in different domestic violence capacities throughout the state, and the use of focus groups with diverse domestic violence professionals.



One of the harvests of this multi-pronged approach is a wealth of information about the state of domestic violence courts in Florida. Another is the Office of Court Improvement's publication of *Assessing the Scene: The Domestic Violence Action Report 2014*. The report describes three comprehensive action items (establishing a Florida Judicial Institute

on Domestic Violence; ensuring a safe, efficient, and economic civil domestic violence process; and providing further education and training) and itemizes the various components of each, offering innovative solutions to the current issues facing Florida's domestic violence courts and suggesting a variety of projects for the STOP Violence against Women federal grants to the courts. This report will guide the goals and plans of the Office of Court Improvement for future fiscal years. ([To access the 2014 \*Domestic Violence Action Report\*, follow this link.](#))

The Office of Court Improvement has already begun to address one of the action items: the call for further education and training catalyzed staff to coordinate six regional trainings for judges who have involvement with domestic violence injunctions specifically or with domestic violence issues generally. The Florida Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence: 2014 Regional Training Program, taking place between mid-September and early December, focuses on the procedural and substantive matters pertaining to these injunctions and on the dynamics of domestic violence. One of the goals of this

training program is to enhance statewide consistency and uniformity in the handling of this critical area of domestic violence.

The Office of Court Improvement has also been coordinating webinars on various topics of relevance to those who work with domestic violence cases; most recently, webinars were offered on Economic Self-Sufficiency for Victims, Stalking, Human Trafficking, and Batterers Intervention Programs in Florida. The office also updated its web-based Domestic Violence Virtual Court, first released in 2009; one of the goals for fiscal year 2014 – 15 is to make it accessible on mobile devices. In addition, two statewide trainings were facilitated for domestic violence coordinators: among the issues addressed in the October 2013 program were Domestic Violence in the Military, Cyber Stalking, and Female Perpetrators of Domestic Violence; the May 2014 program focused largely on court access (e.g., for parties who require court interpreters, for parties with disabilities, and for self-represented litigants).



Judge Carroll Kelly, Miami-Dade County, and Judge Peter Ramsberger, Sixth Circuit, team up to conduct the Florida Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence 2014 Regional Training Program.

The Office of Court Improvement also continues to expand its catalog of online domestic violence-related publications. Staff prepared a judicial reference guide called *Electronic Stalking in Domestic Violence* and published its semiannual *Domestic Violence Review*, a newsletter that contains articles about domestic violence issues as well as information about projects of interest, upcoming events, and conferences. ([Take this link to \*Electronic Stalking\*](#). And [to read the \*Domestic Violence Review\*](#), follow this link.) Staff also revised the *Domestic Violence Benchbook*, a comprehensive resource guide that provides information on every step of the injunction process 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. ([Follow this link for other domestic violence-related publications produced by the Office of Court Improvement.](#))



### Court Improvement: Problem-Solving Courts and Initiatives

Drug court marked its twenty-fifth anniversary in April 2014, and, fittingly, the celebration was hosted in the county where it all began, Miami-Dade. The nation’s first drug court was conceived and implemented in 1989 by Eleventh Circuit Judge Herbert Klein, with approval from the Florida Supreme Court and the support of a range of state and local community leaders. Judge Klein’s vision catalyzed the national drug court movement and spurred a profound change in the way the US responds when a person suffering from substance and/or alcohol addictions is arrested. Often called “the most successful criminal justice reform of our nation’s history,” drug court has since kindled the creation of other kinds of problem-solving dockets using the drug court model—among them, mental health court, veterans court, domestic violence court, and truancy court. Drug courts can now be found in every US state and territory, as well as in 23 other countries: at present, more than 2,800 drug courts are in operation across the nation, and other kinds of problem-solving courts number more than 1,100.

Problem-solving dockets are designed to help individuals who have specific needs and problems that are not being addressed, or cannot adequately be addressed, in traditional courts. Although most problem-solving court models are relatively new, studies are already showing that this approach to differentiated case management—that is, adapting 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 most prevalent problem-solving courts in Florida are drug court, mental health court, and veterans court. Currently, Florida has 102 drug courts: 54 adult; 26 juvenile; 18 dependency; and four DUI. The state also has 26 mental health courts and 21 veterans courts.

Many of the initiatives discussed below result from recommendations of the supreme court’s Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts. Established in 2010, this task force (which is actually a merger of the court’s Task Force on Treatment-Based Drug Court and the Mental Health Subcommittee) is charged with addressing the needs and challenges of individuals with serious mental illnesses and substance abuse issues who become involved in the justice system. Chaired by Judge Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade County, the task force has 23 members, including judges, quasi-judicial officers, justice system partners, and representatives from Florida’s Department of Children and Families, Department of Corrections, and Agency for Health Care Administration.

### Drug Court

In Florida, drug court involves a 12 to 18-month process during which nonviolent offenders whose crimes are related to substance abuse or addiction are placed in a treatment program under the close supervision of a judge and a team of treatment and justice system professionals. Each drug court is unique, tailored to the needs, priorities, and culture of its local community, but drug courts tend to share certain features: for instance, 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, random alcohol and drug tests, closely monitoring compliance and conferring rewards and, when necessary, imposing sanctions; and they are structured to facilitate positive outcomes not only for the participants but also for their loved ones, their victims, and their communities. Drug courts have been extolled for reducing recidivism, improving public safety, turning participants into productive citizens, reuniting families, and saving lives. They have also been shown to save taxpayer dollars.

In 2009, when the economy was deep in the throes of the recession and the prison population was still growing, lawmakers, in an effort to conserve public dollars, voted to expand the number of post-adjudicatory drug courts in the state. This culminated in the development of the Adult Post-Adjudicatory Drug Court Expansion Program, spearheaded by OSCA with the assistance of the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues and the Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals. Piloted in eight counties, the program is designed specifically for prison-bound, nonviolent felony offenders who agree to participate in drug court in lieu of being sent to prison. Now in its fifth year, the program was initially funded with \$18.6 million in federal stimulus dollars that the legislature appropriated to the court system over three-and-a-half years. The federal grant expired in June 30, 2013, and the state funded the program in the 2013 – 14 fiscal year. At the same time lawmakers appropriated that funding, it directed its Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to evaluate the effectiveness of the expansion drug courts, using output, cost, and outcome measures.

The OPPAGA report, titled *Expansion Drug Courts Can Produce Positive Outcomes Through Prison Diversion and Reduced Recidivism*, was released in January 2014. It evaluated the time period between January 2010 and June 2013, using data derived from the more than 2,200 offenders who had been sentenced to the eight pilot courts and the 53% of participants who had successfully completed the program.

Among its findings, the report concluded that diverting prison-bound offenders to drug courts can indeed provide cost savings: participating in expansion drug court costs, on average, \$19.36 per person per day (as calculated by OSCA); being housed in prison, on the other hand, costs \$47.50 per person per day (as documented by the Florida Department of Corrections). The report emphasized that expansion drug courts produce the greatest savings when they serve prison-bound offenders (as opposed to offenders who would have been placed on some other form of community supervision): if



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

100 percent of the drug court graduates had been prison-bound, the report estimates that cost savings through diversion would have been \$7.6 million.

The report also concluded that participants who successfully completed drug court had a reduced rate of recidivism as measured by data on felony convictions and prison sentences. Compared to similar offenders, drug court graduates had fewer felony convictions: only 9 percent of drug court graduates received a felony conviction within two years of completion versus 19 percent of the comparison group. Those who completed drug court were also less likely to receive prison sentences: only 2 percent of drug court graduates received a prison sentence within two years of completion, while 9 percent of the comparison group did. The report also posited that additional cost savings are realized through reductions in recidivism—an effect of helping participants overcome addiction and avoid criminal behavior; the report estimated that

the annual savings through reduced recidivism are over \$500,000 for each year of prison avoided. In part, thanks to the findings documented in this report, lawmakers, in the 2014 legislative session, appropriated \$5.5 million in recurring dollars to continue the program long-term. ([Take this link to the OPPAGA report.](#))

The case management and data reporting needs of the post-adjudicatory drug courts are complex, so, soon after the pilot became operational, OSCA contracted with a vendor to adapt its drug court case management system to handle the pilot program’s specific case management needs. The web-based Florida Drug Court Case Management System streamlines data collection and entry, allowing drug court coordinators and case managers to manage their caseloads and monitor program outcomes efficiently. Among the benefits of this system are 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



Drug court was conceived in Florida 25 years ago; in April 2014, in honor of National Drug Court Month and the twenty-fifth anniversary of drug court, a celebration was hosted in the county where it all began, Miami-Dade; those who could not be present for the ceremony were able to watch via the [miamidade.gov](http://miamidade.gov) web portal. Pictured here is the pioneer of drug court, (retired) Judge Herbert Klein, Eleventh Circuit, who was honored with special accolades at the event.

comparable data that can be used to inform the supreme court’s policy and budget decisions. The system also provides a mechanism for performing local and statewide evaluations, which provide the branch with a reliable measure of the effectiveness and efficiency of drug court.

Though the case management system was initially designed for collecting and managing data for the eight expansion drug courts, OSCA has gradually been expanding the system for use with other problem-solving court types. Recently, modules have been developed for juvenile drug court, family dependency drug court, mental health court, and veterans court; currently 27 problem-solving courts are using the case management system. Participating courts bear no cost to use this system. ([For more information on the Florida Drug Court Case Management System, follow this link.](#))



Finally, in 2014, task force members collaborated with Florida Partners in Crisis, the Florida Association of Drug Court Professionals, and OSCA to develop content for and helped plan a comprehensive, two-day training conference, called Leading Change, Inspiring Innovation in Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice. More than 500 justice system stakeholders, judges, and court staff attended the statewide program, benefiting from sessions on best practices, risk and need assessments, working with veterans with mental health and substance use disorders, medication-assisted treatment, and other related topics.

## Mental Health Initiatives

The same circumstances that inspired the development of drug courts prompted the creation of mental health diversion programs, mental health dockets, and mental health courts: repeat offenders in need of treatment services. As community resources for people with serious mental illnesses began dwindling in response to the economic downturn, 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

***Instead of recommending forensic treatment facilities for individuals with serious mental illness or co-occurring disorders, the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts advocates for providing community-based services and support. The task force recognizes that this alternative approach saves taxpayer dollars—and it also redirects the state's financial priorities from the incarceration of nonviolent offenders to their rehabilitation.***

their mental health disorders. Monitoring and treating them in a mental health court is more effective, efficient, and economical than the remedies available through traditional justice system approaches.

In addition to championing the establishment of mental health dockets across the state, the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues also promotes the development of safe, effective, and cost-efficient alternative placement options for people adjudicated incompetent to proceed or not guilty by reason of insanity.

Committee Chair Judge Leifman stresses that Florida's current forensic treatment system does not prevent individuals from becoming involved in the justice system—nor does it reduce recidivism in jails, prisons, and state hospitals for those individuals once they have become involved in the justice system. Moreover, it is expensive, costing approximately \$625 million annually to house people with mental illnesses in Florida's prisons and forensic treatment facilities—and an additional \$365 million each year to house people with mental illnesses in local jails. Over the next decade, these expenditures are forecast to increase dramatically, by as much as a billion dollars each year.

Instead of recommending forensic treatment facilities for individuals with serious mental illness or co-occurring disorders, the task force advocates for providing community-based services and support. The task force recognizes that this alternative approach saves taxpayer dollars—and it also redirects the state's financial priorities from the incarceration of nonviolent offenders to their rehabilitation. Thus the task force has been exploring the options for expanding a successful, community-based forensic commitment program called the Miami-Dade Forensic Alternative Center; established in August 2009, this program is a legislature-funded collaborative effort between the Eleventh Judicial Circuit and the Department of Children and Families. Participants in this pilot program include adults age 18 and older who have been found by the circuit to be incompetent to proceed on a second or third degree felony, who do not have significant histories of violent felony offenses, and who are not likely to face incarceration if convicted of their alleged offenses; admission is limited to individuals who would otherwise be committed to the Department of Children and Families and admitted to state forensic treatment facilities.

Individuals admitted into the program are diverted from forensic treatment facilities into a secure inpatient setting where they receive crisis stabilization and short-term residential treatment services. When they are ready to step down to a less restrictive community placement and outpatient services, they are given re-entry assistance and ongoing support services. 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.

So far, 103 individuals have been diverted from placement in state forensic treatment facilities into the Miami-Dade Forensic Alternative Center. These participants are identified as ready for discharge an average of 64 days sooner than those who are admitted to state forensic facilities, and they spend an average of 32 days fewer under forensic commitment. In addition, after discharge from this program, these individuals have 68 percent fewer jail bookings and 94 percent fewer jail days. And services in this program cost almost 20 percent less than the average cost for services provided in state forensic treatment facilities. Judge Leifman and the task force continue to press for the passage of bills to support the expansion of this program to other areas around the state.

## Veterans Court

The US is home to approximately 22 million veterans, more than 1.5 million of whom live in Florida, according to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. Indeed, Florida has the third largest population of veterans in the nation. Veterans frequently return home with physical injuries—but war commonly leaves profound psychological scars as well. In addition to depression, veterans often suffer from two “signature injuries” of war—traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder; all three are risk factors for substance abuse. Veterans often find it difficult to re-assimilate into their communities—and those with untreated substance abuse or mental health issues may find it even harder to return to their home lives. These challenges can lead to criminal activity.

Veterans Court was founded in 2008 in Buffalo, NY, to address the substance abuse and mental health needs of veterans within the criminal justice system. Veterans court utilizes the drug court model, and, like drug court and mental health court, it holds offenders answerable for their offenses while connecting them with treatment services that address the complex needs associated with substance abuse, mental illness, and concerns particular to the traumatic experience of war. Unlike drug court and mental health court, however, veterans court relies significantly 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 to serve these offenders’ treatment needs.

*Veterans court utilizes the drug court model, and, like drug court and mental health court, it holds offenders answerable for their offenses while connecting them with treatment services that address the complex needs associated with substance abuse, mental illness, and concerns particular to the traumatic experience of war.*

Florida launched its first veterans docket in 2010, and 21 are now operational. These dockets are showing great promise, and lawmakers are encouraging the development of more special dockets and diversion programs for veterans.

Finally, to help judges, magistrates, and court personnel respond effectively to the substance abuse

and mental health needs of Florida’s veterans, OSCA staff, with guidance and input from the task force, developed the *Veterans Resource Guide for the Florida State Court System*. The guide recognizes the critical role that judges and court personnel play in ensuring that the veterans with mental health and substance use disorders who have entered the criminal justice system get access to treatment and resources to treat these disorders effectively so they can return to being productive members of the community. Among the topics the guide covers are Why are Veterans Unique, Identifying a Veteran, Veterans Court, Veterans Benefits, Mental Health, Physical Health, Substance Abuse, Military Sexual Trauma, Domestic Violence, and Homelessness. [\(To access the Veterans Resource Guide, follow this link.\)](#)

## Alternative Dispute Resolution

Among its suggestions for processing cases more efficiently, effectively, and in a timely manner, the long-range plan recommends that the court system “continue to explore and implement effective alternative dispute resolution processes.” Mediation and other alternative dispute resolution methods help to improve the administration of justice by promoting communication—and thereby opening the door to problem-solving—between parties, by conserving judicial time, and by helping the branch use public resources responsibly.

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR), initially spurred by grassroots, community-based efforts, had its beginnings in Dade County’s first citizen dispute settlement center, established in 1975. ADR was brought under the umbrella of the Florida court system in 1988, and, since then, the branch has developed the most comprehensive court-connected mediation program in the country.

Former Chief Justice Joseph Boyd and Talbot “Sandy” D’Alemberte, former president of the American Bar Association and former dean of the FSU College of Law, lent support to this effort when, in 1986, they established the Florida Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) as the first statewide center for ADR education, training, and research.

Housed in the supreme court building, the DRC sponsors an annual conference for alternative dispute resolution professionals; conducts county mediation training for volunteers; assists 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.

The DRC’s paramount continuing education event of the 2013 – 14 fiscal year was its twenty-first annual statewide conference. Building upon the theme of growth and expansion that undergirded the prior year’s conference, the fall 2013 program, titled *Expanding Our Horizons*, was a resounding reminder that the field of ADR continues to blossom and that mediation is just one of many ADR processes. As a result, its annual conference is increasingly designed to introduce emerging ADR processes and to educate a wider variety of ADR professionals. For the 2013 program, for instance, one could participate in a half-day pre-conference training on Supreme Court Approved Non-Binding Arbitration; in addition, the conference offered a session on early neutral evaluation (a process that occurs at the pre-trial stage and assists parties in identifying the most important issues in a case) and a session on dispute boards (which bring collaboration to construction projects to minimize problems during the course of the work). Because of the enthusiastic response, for its recent fall 2014 program, the DRC offered two different sessions on parenting coordination, one on eldercare coordination, and one on non-binding arbitration. For both the 2013 and the 2014 programs, the DRC extended the length of the conference by a few hours so that attendees could earn the same number of Continuing Mediation Education hours they did in the past while still learning about some of these rising ADR processes for which CME credits are not available.



Local elementary school children who are studying conflict resolution skills in the Florida State University Schools, Second Circuit, commemorate Mediation Week with an educational visit to the supreme court. Each of the participating children receives a certificate from Janice Fleischer, chief of the Florida Dispute Resolution Center, and Susan Marvin, senior staff attorney with the center.

This growing variety of ADR practitioners will also now be mirrored in the supreme court's Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and Policy. Established in 2003, this committee (a merger of the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules and the Committee on Dispute Resolution Policy) is charged with monitoring court rules governing alternative dispute resolution policies and procedures and with making recommendations as necessary to improve the use of mediation, arbitration, and other forms of alternative dispute resolution to supplement the judicial process. Seeking to ensure well-rounded, truly representational committee membership, the supreme court, in a September 2013 administrative order, set term limits for members and defined the composition and size of the committee. As a result,



The children show off the colorful, peace-promoting “quilt” they created in honor of Mediation Week.

the committee is now capped at 17 members, at least seven of whom must be certified mediators who are not lawyers. Among the other criteria, the committee must include two members who are primary mediation trainers; one member must be a certified county mediator; two must be arbitrators; no more than two may be trial court administrators; and no more than four may be judges. Members will serve three-year terms and may be reappointed, but no member may serve more than nine years. In adhering to these new requirements, the committee “shall reflect the diversity of the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) community served.” [\(To read the administrative order, follow this link.\)](#)

In another sign of the evolution in ADR, the committee proposed, and the supreme court approved, a new body of rules governing parenting coordinators, who provide a child-focused ADR process and assist parents in creating or implementing a parenting plan. In part I of the new body of rules, the supreme court sets forth ethical standards for parenting coordinators and reinforces the concepts of communication, negotiation, and facilitation on which parenting coordination is based. In part II, the court addresses discipline: the court has made the DRC responsible for overseeing the grievance procedure, so complaints alleging violations of the standards for qualified and court-appointed parenting coordinators will now be filed with the DRC. [\(This link goes to the supreme court opinion establishing the new rules.\)](#)

Finally, the DRC continues to expand its use of technology to streamline its processes and to assist ADR professionals, trainers, attorneys, and the public. Most recently, the DRC was the recipient of a 2014 Prudential Productivity Award for automating its mediator renewal process. (Presented by Florida Taxwatch, the Productivity Awards honor individuals and teams of state government employees for creating and implementing solutions and productivity improvements that save taxpayer dollars.) Before implementing the automated mediator renewal process, DRC staff had to print and mail forms, instructions, and rules to every mediator whose certification was coming up for renewal (for approximately 200 mediators per month). With more than 6,000 certified mediators across the state—each of whom has to renew certification every two years—the process had come to be both costly and time-consuming. The DRC established a Renewal Automation Team to develop a mechanism for providing all renewal materials electronically, via email and the internet. The renewal process is now fully automated and paper-free: mediators have access to all renewal materials 24/7 (and can print only those materials they need), and the state is experiencing savings in resources, both human and financial; moreover, because less paper and toner are being used, the environment is also a winner.

## Mortgage Foreclosure Initiative

Florida's housing market is decidedly showing signs of recovery, with positive growth expected to continue through 2014. But Florida still posts one of the country's highest foreclosure rates—and the judicial branch continues its efforts to resolve the glut of backlogged cases while protecting the rights of the parties involved in litigation.

The courts have been making significant progress in reducing the backlog: on July 1, 2013 (the beginning of the fiscal year), more than 329,000 foreclosure cases were pending before the courts; at the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 2014, approximately 159,000 foreclosure cases were pending, and 88,000 new foreclosure cases were filed in that time span. Altogether, the courts disposed of 230,000 foreclosure cases in the 2013 – 14 fiscal year

Indispensable to this success has been the \$21.3 million that the legislature, in 2013, appropriated to the state courts system from the National Mortgage Settlement funds: \$16 million for human resources such as additional senior judge days, general magistrates, and case managers, and \$5.3 million for technology enhancements; lawmakers also appropriated \$9.7 million to the clerks of court to assist with these cases (the funding was designated for fiscal years 2013 – 14 and 2014 – 15).

Equally fundamental to the progress has been the trial courts' implementation of many of the practical strategies recommended in the judicial branch's *Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan*, released in April 2013. The plan was developed by the Trial Court Budget Commission's Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup, which took a bottom-up approach, basing its recommendations largely on process improvements that were already showing great promise at the local level.

In developing the plan, the workgroup's goal was to present the trial courts with a spectrum of viable, resourceful, cost-effective, homegrown methods to consider in addressing their backlog crisis. Specifically, the *Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan* offers four main solutions to the problems impeding the just and timely processing of foreclosure cases. Three of the recommendations pertain to personnel and case management, and one concerns technology resources. ([To read the plan, follow this link.](#))

Specifically, the plan suggests the implementation of more active judicial or quasi-judicial case management and adjudication, including expanded use of general magistrates into the civil division (the supreme court adopted rule 1.491, Florida Rules of Civil Procedure, to authorize referral of residential mortgage foreclosure cases to general magistrates with implied consent of the parties). The plan also recommends that each chief judge develop a case management plan that optimizes the circuit's use of existing and additional resources in the resolution of foreclosure cases. In addition, the plan calls for the hiring of additional case management personnel to allow for focused attention on older foreclosure cases.

To help judges move the foreclosure cases forward, the plan also urges the deployment of technology resources—in particular, judicial viewers. The judicial viewer is an interactive, web-based application that enables judges to view and work on electronic documents, to manage their cases electronically from any location and across many devices, and to issue court documents electronically; it also provides them with basic tools and capabilities at the local level to manage and track case activity.

The supreme court adopted the plan in June 2013, and the Foreclosure Initiative was launched. More than a year has passed since then. And, although some challenges still persist—some courts are still having trouble getting accurate data,



Twentieth Circuit Judge Margaret Steinbeck, who chaired the Trial Court Budget Commission, established the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup, which produced the court system's *Foreclosure Backlog Reduction Plan*.

for instance, and the development of the technology solutions is taking time—on the whole, all 20 circuits, many of which have adopted a team approach, have made notable progress in reducing the backlog of residential mortgage foreclosure cases.

Meanwhile, in the course of meeting the challenges of the foreclosure crisis and considering strategies for developing a more effective and comprehensive way of handling these cases, the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup discovered several innovative methods for improving the administration of justice generally. For instance, expanding the use of general magistrates and adopting an active case management approach (which, in the past, had typically only been used in the family division in Florida) has auspicious implications for handling other cases in the civil division.

In addition, the judicial viewer, while being used initially to facilitate the processing of foreclosure cases, has the potential to serve as the framework for an automated statewide case management system—something the judicial branch has sought for over a decade. The judicial viewer is one of two components of a judicial branch project called the Integrated Trial Court Adjudication System (ITCAS). The second component, called Judicial Data Management Services, is described as a state-level data management strategy that will pull court activity data from the local judicial viewer systems, among other sources, and integrate them into a coherent whole, providing for statewide court operations management. ITCAS has the potential to lead to better management of cases, better statewide-level court data reporting, and improved performance generally.

Finally, the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup recognized that judges, judicial officers, case managers, and other support staff need appropriate tools to help them manage this dynamic and complex foreclosure caseload—and one essential tool is meaningful and accurate real-time information reflecting the movement of these cases through the foreclosure process. Thus, to track and monitor case activity data for the foreclosure initiative, the workgroup proposed, OSCA developed, and the supreme court approved a new data collection plan. For 36 years, the supreme court has been relying on a uniform case reporting system called the Summary Reporting System (SRS), which has historically provided OSCA with data that assist the supreme court in its management and oversight role. But, because it is a summary-level system, the SRS has limits; for



Mr. Mark Weinberg, trial court administrator for the Seventh Circuit, chaired the Foreclosure Initiative Workgroup.

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instance, while it reveals the number of filings and the number of dispositions that a particular circuit had, it does not provide specific case information. However, the Foreclosure Initiative's data collection plan does, furnishing, for example, the specific cases filed, the specific cases disposed, and the specific cases that are still pending. Called Initiative Data, this system, which was implemented in June 2014, is a standardized way of calculating and

looking at workload, and it provides all levels of court with critical information concerning the movement of foreclosure cases through the courts. Currently, this system is being used exclusively for foreclosure cases—but it could be adapted for use for all case types, providing invaluable local, circuit, and statewide data. The judicial branch aims to implement this system in all court divisions and is seeking resources to make this goal a reality.

## 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, numerous groups within the court system offer high-quality education and training opportunities to the people who work in the judicial branch, making efficient and effective use of limited funding and staff resources. For instance, the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity—with the help of the 26 diversity teams (one in each circuit court and DCA, and one for the supreme court and OSCA) 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 often hold trainings for members of their workforce: several circuits have begun developing continuing education programs for their court interpreters, for instance.

In addition, various OSCA units prepare, or coordinate, education programs for judges, court personnel, and justice system partners across the state. The Office of Court Improvement, for example, continues to expand its repertoire 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 conducting local mediation education programs, facilitates a statewide conference each year for alternative dispute resolution professionals, giving attendees a chance to earn continuing education credits in mediator ethics, cultural diversity, domestic violence education, and other topics of relevance to their practice. In addition, the Court Services Unit offers 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 branch’s statewide ADA coordinator organizes educational bimonthly conference calls, and also coordinates statewide training programs, for the circuit and appellate courts’ ADA coordinators on topics related to court access for people with disabilities. Furthermore, the Administrative Services Division and the Personnel Services Unit periodically organize statewide instructional events on topics of importance to court staff who work in budget services, finance and accounting, general services, and human resources, and the General Services Unit coordinates trainings on emergency preparedness for the branch’s emergency coordinating officers. Readers can learn more about this wealth of instructional offerings elsewhere in this annual report.

This section of the report focuses on the education programs and resources supported by the Florida Court Education Council (FCEC), which was established by the supreme court in 1978 to coordinate and oversee the creation and maintenance of a comprehensive education program for judges and some court personnel groups and to manage the budget that sustains these ventures. Chaired by 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 and Quasi-Judicial Officers

Judges are required to earn a minimum of 30 approved credit hours of continuing judicial education every three years, and new judges have to satisfy additional requirements. Each year, the council works with the leaders of the judicial conferences and 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. The Conference of County Court Judges of Florida and the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges offered their annual education programs in summer 2013 (the trial court administrators held their yearly education event at the same time and place as the circuit judges' program). And the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges held its annual education program in fall 2013 (at the same time and place, the appellate clerks and marshals held their yearly educational events).

In addition to the three conferences, the branch has two judicial 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 for those seeking to hone existing skills or to delve deeply into a subject matter area; also available are courses that encourage thoughtful reflection on the meaning of justice. Florida's appellate and trial judges, as well as its general magistrates and child support enforcement hearing officers, may apply to attend this annual program. Altogether, the 2014 program had 284 participants (plus 52 judge faculty, many of whom also attended courses).

Trial court judges who are new to the bench—and, since 2013, all new general magistrates and child support enforcement hearing officers as well—are required to participate in the Florida Judicial College program. This intensive, 10-day program has 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, phase one drew 22 new 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 20 new judges and 12 general magistrates/child support enforcement hearing officers. In addition, 37 judges who were preparing to rotate to a new division attended the three-day "Fundamentals" portion of the second phase. The Florida Judicial College includes one additional component: a year-long mentoring program.



Justice Jorge Labarga chairs the Florida Court Education Council.

The Florida Court Education Council also sponsors an education program for judges new to the appellate bench: the New Appellate Judges Program was held in spring 2014. 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 roster 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 prepares them to create participatory learning activities.

In these two-day faculty training programs, which are offered at least once a year, judges learn how to do a needs assessment, develop learning objectives, team teach, 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 (and what is likely to fizzle). These training programs ensure that the FCEC's education initiatives remain needs-based, learner-driven, and beneficial and that the faculty are skilled at meaningfully responding to the needs of the students. In the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, 24 judges participated in the faculty training.

Florida's judicial educators clearly take their teaching responsibilities very seriously. In fact, at its mid-year meeting, members of the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges' Education Committee discussed strategies for improving even further the quality of the teaching: acknowledging a general over-reliance on PowerPoint slides, committee members contemplated ways to encourage faculty to make greater use of techniques that promote active learning. As a result of the meeting, the committee is planning a faculty assistance/enrichment event that will give circuit judges who will be

teaching in 2015 a chance to sharpen their skills at creating the sorts of learning activities that foster full engagement in the learning process.

In addition, this year, the FCEC funded a Senior Judge Education Program, which consisted of a full day of diversity training and a half day of Florida law updates. Altogether, 22 senior judges from across the state participated. This program was piloted in 2013 and was so successful that it was offered again this year. Senior judges are an important judicial resource—and their contributions are especially needed when the judicial branch is facing temporary caseload spikes and backlogs; currently, for example, senior judges are playing a crucial role in ensuring the just and timely resolution of the backlogged mortgage foreclosure cases. These days, more than 186 active senior judges continue to share their expertise with Florida’s court system and with the people who rely on its services.

Other FCEC-sponsored programs for judges and quasi-judicial officers included a Foreclosure Initiative Training Program that comprised a half-day training on foreclosure basics and new legislation and a half-day training on best practices, case management, and evidence (as well as a day-long training exclusively for all new general magistrates who were hired for this initiative); a Traffic Hearing Officer Pilot Education Program, which utilized a model curriculum that was recently completed under the aegis of the FCEC Publications Committee; 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 to construct a plan for meeting these educational needs. Since 2008, the FCEC has provided funding for numerous statewide educational initiatives for court personnel groups, and it has also granted funding assistance to support local education programs developed by court personnel.

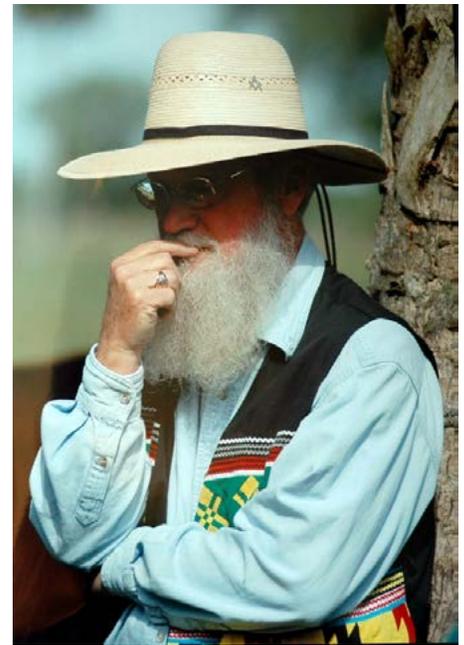


Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA, and Professor Timothy Terrell, Emory University School of Law, teach a course on Writing What You Mean and Meaning What You Write for the 2014 Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies.

In fiscal year 2013 – 14, the council funded 18 local training programs on topics like diversity and cultural awareness, leadership skills, communication and motivation, and case management skills. The council also provided funding for three statewide programs: the Judicial Assistants Association of Florida and the Florida Trial Court Staff Attorneys received support for their annual conferences, and, for the third year, the FCEC sponsored the Florida Court Personnel Institute, a two-day program tailored to the education needs of Florida’s court employees. This year, 113 court personnel participated in the institute, taking one of four tracks: Motivation and Team Building in Today’s Court Workplace; Are You Getting Your Message Across; Public Perceptions of Fairness; and a Faculty Training Program. Each year, participants have appreciated the level of instruction and its direct applicability to their work lives; evaluations confirm that attendees are energized by the experience and

delight in the opportunity to meet others at similar professional levels throughout the court system.

Thanks to the work of the Florida Court Personnel Committee over the last six years, the number of court employees who have been able to take advantage of educational offerings has burgeoned: the three Florida Court Personnel Institutes and the nearly 90 education initiatives for court personnel groups have enhanced the abilities of close to 4,000 attendees altogether (note: some employees have had the opportunity to participate in more than one program over time, so this number reflects the number of program participants, not the number of court employees who have attended programs). Most impressive is that all of this has been achieved with a quite modest budget, largely because the vast majority of programs are developed and offered on the local level. Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit, who chaired the committee from its inception through June 2014, emphasized that “Giving interdisciplinary educational opportunities to the people who support the judiciary is essential to delivering justice,” for they provide court employees with the tools they need to perform their work with competence, quality, fairness, and impartiality. To continue the committee’s important work, the chief justice appointed Judge Angela Cowden, Tenth Circuit, as the new chair.



Senior Judge Nelson Bailey, Fifteenth Circuit, gave a presentation on La Florida: A Diverse and Interesting Place at this year’s Senior Judges Education Program.

### Publications and Other Self-Learning Resources



#### Resource Library

To supplement the host of training and educational offerings for judges and court personnel, Long-Range Issue #3 recommends that the branch continue to expand its storehouse 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, develop distance learning projects for court personnel, and expand the online Court Education Resource Library.

The FCEC’s Publications Committee, with the assistance of OSCA’s Publications Unit, worked industriously to add to its catalog of online publications during the 2013 – 14 fiscal year. Publications added to the resource library include the *Small Claims Benchbook*, the *Office of the State Courts Administrator Employee Manual*, the *Fundamentals for Civil Traffic Infraction Hearing Officers Manual*, and the *Civil Jury Trial Benchbook*.



Fifteenth Circuit Judge Kathleen Kroll, who chaired the Florida Court Personnel Committee, addresses conferees at the 2013 Florida Court Personnel Institute.

And the following publications were updated: *An Aid to Understanding Canon 7*; the *Contempt Benchguide*; the *Criminal Benchguide for Circuit Judges*; the *Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee Opinions Topical Index*; the *Judicial Administration Benchguide*; the *Judicial Ethics Benchguide*; and the *Pandemic Influenza Benchguide*. 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*.

The committee also developed two webinars for court personnel. *Social Media Issues for Florida Court Personnel*, which had 95 participants, was designed for trial court administrators, court



Judge Angela Cowden, Tenth Circuit, was recently appointed to chair the Florida Court Personnel Committee.

general counsel, and others who handle legal or human resource issues involving social media or who are developing or implementing a court social media policy. And *Family and Medical Leave Act Issues for Florida Court Personnel*, which was designed for trial court administrators, court general counsel, human resources employees, and others who handle legal or human resource issues involving the Family and Medical Leave Act, had 77 participants.

Finally, the Publications Committee continues to build the online Court Education Resource Library. The resource library provides browsers with easy access to a panorama of educational materials: links to publications and other materials prepared by the Publications Committee and other 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.



### 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.***

Issue #4 of the long-range plan begins with the following avowal: “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.”

Yet “There are obstacles that litigants face...in seeking access to the courts,” acknowledges the paragraph immediately following this declaration. Among the impediments enumerated are cultural and attitudinal biases, language and communication barriers, and physical and electronic hurdles.

The judicial branch is actively committed to identifying and reducing these obstacles. Through its endeavors to promote diversity awareness, to expand the pool of certified 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 ensure that all people have meaningful access to Florida’s courts and that everyone who enters the courts, whether literally or virtually, is treated fairly and respectfully.

### Emergency Preparedness

For court access to be a reality, the courthouse doors must be open, and the courts must be in working order. When courts have to close because of an emergency, whether the source is human or a natural cataclysm, then, in effect, court access is denied and justice is delayed.

The September 11 tragedy was the spur that propelled 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 offensives, 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.” The workgroup was guided by two policy goals: protect the health and safety of everyone inside the courts and keep the courts open to ensure justice for the people.

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 a designated 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 United Supreme Court/Branch Court Emergency Management Group (CEMG) to recommend policy for, prepare for, and respond to emergencies both in the supreme court building and in state courts across Florida. In addition, to expedite responses to threats and emergencies as well as to foster the coordination of resources, the branch established lines of communication with executive branch agencies and with local and statewide emergency management and first responder agencies. 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 includes being prepared both for nature-made crises (tropical storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, pandemics, etc.) and for human-made calamities (oil spills, biohazards, extended information systems outages, military or terrorist attack-related incidents, and the like). Generally, the emergencies that tend to strike Florida are weather-connected (Florida is the most hurricane-prone state in the nation, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; historically, 40 percent of the hurricanes that have pummeled the US hit the Sunshine State). Currently, Florida is coming to the close of its ninth consecutive season without a hurricane landfall. And while no courts had to close in response to damage from hurricanes or tropical storms during the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, several courts did face brief closures due to heavy rains and rising waters, major flooding, or winter storms. Other causes for temporary closure were power outages, a water main rupture, a malfunctioning A/C unit, and a major server failure—as well as incidents involving a person with a firearm, a death threat, and a bomb threat.



After deftly addressing a courthouse threat, court emergency management team members treat the incident as an opportunity to review their continuity of operations plan and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that their court is as prepared as possible to respond to crises, recover from them, and mitigate against their impacts. The CEMG regularly encourages each court to review its plan, conduct table-top exercises that test its plan, and engage in drills (fire, emergency evacuation, and shelter in place drills) a few times each year.

The April 2014 floods in the Florida Panhandle permanently displaced Escambia Community Corrections and the Escambia County child support hearing officers and staff from the county office building they inhabited.

To support these efforts, Steven Hall, the chief of OSCA's General Services Unit and the branch's statewide emergency coordinating officer, is in the process of instituting monthly conference calls for all the court system's emergency coordinating officers. These calls will serve to reinforce the importance of having a current continuity of operations plan and of regularly reviewing and drilling it; topics will encompass the gamut of hazards and risks of which the emergency officers should be aware. Mr. Hall envisions these calls as being "opportunities to ask questions, connect with one another, share ideas, and learn from each other," and he anticipates that one of the first calls will focus on the Ebola virus: the CEMG is currently monitoring the situation and considering how the courts will ensure continuity of operations should the virus reach Florida.

In addition, Mr. Hall and the General Services Unit have been updating and expanding the emergency preparedness resources available on the Florida Courts internet and intranet sites. The Emergency Preparedness internet site will

provide general information for court employees; in addition to material on topics like “Pandemic Preparedness” and “Preparedness and People with Disabilities,” it will include direct links to entities like the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Florida County Emergency Management Contacts, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The intranet site is being augmented to include revised planning templates (e.g., a continuity of operations plan template, mission essential functions template, alternate facilities template), court-specific training information, and information about and handouts for the monthly conference calls for emergency coordinating officers. The General Services intranet site is also being broadened and will soon include information related to risk management, workplace safety, loss prevention, workplace ergonomics, and related information for judges and court personnel.

### Fairness and Diversity Awareness

The judicial branch works heedfully to create court settings that are free of bias—environments in which judges, court personnel, attorneys, and litigants treat each other with courtesy, dignity, and impartiality. This aspiration is reflected in one of the goals of Long-Range Issue #4—that “Florida’s courts will treat all people fairly and with respect.”

For nearly three decades, the branch has been striving to realize this vision with the help of several supreme court-appointed 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). More 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 committee was chaired by Judge Gill Freeman, Eleventh Circuit; since then, Judge Scott Bernstein, also of the Eleventh Circuit, has been chair.



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

Over the course of the last ten years, the standing committee has made momentous progress: among its accomplishments, it 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; and coordinated the development of a courts-specific survey instrument for evaluating all state court facilities to determine their accessibility to people with disabilities. Ongoing projects include the provision of regular diversity and sensitivity awareness programs for judges and court staff; the implementation of 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; the encouragement of local initiatives to strengthen court-community relationships; the production of practical educational materials to help judges, court staff, and attorneys recognize, respond to, and understand their role in eliminating bias from the courtroom; and collaborations 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, regional, and state levels.

Judges can use approved courses in fairness and diversity training to fulfill the four-hour ethics requirement they must meet every three years. In addition, new judges are required to attend a full day, in-person fairness and diversity training within three years of becoming a judge. Therefore, one of the standing committee’s leading responsibilities has been to ensure that diversity awareness programs are regularly available. In fiscal year 2013 – 14, the committee made every effort to warrant that judges were able to satisfy this continuing judicial education requirement. To meet this goal, the standing committee’s Education Subcommittee, co-chaired by Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit, and Judge Peter Estrada,

Tenth Circuit, continued to work with the Florida Court Education Council and with the chief judges to ensure that diversity education programs were offered in each trial court and DCA. The subcommittee also helped to coordinate and participated in several statewide events. For instance, Judge Estrada was a lead faculty member of a Fairness and Diversity for the Judiciary session at the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, and he and Judge Isom facilitated and were among the faculty for a day-long diversity education program for 22 senior judges from across the state. As Judge Bernstein emphasized, “One of our biggest accomplishments is that we already trained over 1,000 judges in a day-long diversity education program.”

In addition, the standing committee worked with the court system’s 26 diversity teams, providing general guidance on and support for sustaining diversity awareness by combining diversity education programs with other local initiatives designed to appreciate differences and celebrate diversity—initiatives like diversity mixers and minority mentoring picnics, for example.

The standing committee also encouraged local court efforts to reach out to and educate the public about the court system, thereby strengthening court-community relationships and enhancing the public image of the judicial branch. Recent court-community relationship-building activities include courthouse tours, Justice Teaching and other school outreach initiatives, teen courts, Law Day and Constitution Day activities, “meet your judge” and “inside the courts” programs, jury appreciation events, adoption events, speaker’s bureaus, citizens guides, citizen advisory committees, and the like. ([This link goes to a compilation of court-community relations activities.](#))



Standing committee member Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit, was one of the faculty at this year’s Senior Judges Fairness and Diversity Training.



Standing committee member Judge Peter Estrada, Tenth Circuit, was one of the faculty at this year’s Senior Judges Fairness and Diversity Training.

To advance fairness and diversity initiatives in the legal profession, the standing committee also carries on with its efforts to build partnerships and collaborations with The Supreme Court of Florida Commission on Professionalism, local bar associations, community organizations, and Florida law schools. Members of the standing committee participated in numerous events sponsored by these entities to help develop, implement, and enhance diversity education programs and opportunities in the legal profession. In addition, the standing committee reached out to the dean of each Florida law school in an effort to develop relationships and to offer itself as a resource. Standing committee members also sought out opportunities to give presentations at and to participate in various local, regional, and statewide fairness and diversity events—diversity picnics, diversity mixers, cultural awareness presentations, and diversity symposiums, for example.

Finally, Judge Bernstein was recently elected to serve on the board of directors for the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts. This organization, which comprises 37-member states, works to address and build solutions for fairness issues and to share research and resources. One of the consortium’s current projects is to inscribe the oral histories of all its member states—an endeavor that is giving Florida an opportunity to document its many years of work on fairness and diversity and its longstanding commitment to eliminate bias from court operations.

**Court Interpreters Program**

According to the most recent US census figures, half of the nation’s foreign born population resides in four states: California, New York, Texas, and Florida. Altogether, 19.3 percent of Florida’s total population (which is approximately 19.5 million) is foreign born, with 27.3 percent speaking a language other than English at home.

The judicial branch recognizes that language barriers can limit access to the courts and court services: as Long-Range Issue #4 observes, “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.” Recognizing that meaningful access to the courts should be available for all people, regardless of their ability to communicate effectively in the English language, the judicial branch is committed to building its pool of qualified court interpreters and to harnessing technology to facilitate the sharing of interpreting resources among circuits.

To reduce the effect of language barriers, the courts must have access to a pool of well-qualified court interpreters—and judges and trial court administrators must have the means to evaluate the credentials of spoken language interpreters seeking appointment. To support these efforts, the supreme court adopted the Florida Rules for Certification and Regulation of Court Interpreters (the Court Interpreter Rules) in 2006. In adopting the rules, the court also created the Court Interpreter Certification Board, which is responsible for certifying, regulating, and disciplining court interpreters as well as for suspending and revoking certification; currently chairing the board is Judge J. Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit. At the same time, the court established the court interpreter certification program.



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



Ms Melinda Gonzalez-Hibner, a Spanish court interpreter certified by the Colorado and US courts and qualified by the US Department of State, conducts a spirited Orientation Workshop for the Florida Court Interpreter Certification and Regulation Program. Attending the two-day workshop is one of the requirements for achieving certification. This workshop, held in Tallahassee, drew 60 prospective certified court interpreters.

The Court Interpreter Rules established two levels of expertise for spoken language interpreters working in the courts: certified interpreters and duly qualified interpreters. To become a certified interpreter, an applicant had to attend a two-day orientation program offered by OSCA; pass a written examination; pass an oral proficiency examination; take an oath to uphold the code of conduct for court interpreters; undergo a background check; and comply with continuing education requirements. A duly qualified interpreter, on the other hand, merely had to attend the OSCA orientation program, obtain a passing grade on the written examination, be “familiar with” the court interpreters’ code of conduct, and have “an understanding of basic legal terminology in both languages.”

Recently, the Court Interpreter Certification Board acknowledged that the court interpreter program had made considerable progress in eliminating language barriers in the courts; however, it opined that the program could be strengthened and better equipped to provide effective interpreting services. After performing a comprehensive study of the program, the Supreme Court Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability corroborated the board’s opinion, finding problems with the certification process (including lack of incentive for interpreters to become certified and inadequate standards for duly qualified interpreters). In response to the study, the board proposed amendments to the Court Interpreter Rules that would improve the overall quality of interpreting services available to the courts. In a March 2014 opinion, the supreme court adopted the amendments as proposed.

In the amended rules, the “duly qualified” designation has been eliminated. Instead, the classification system now has three tiers, with the following official designations: a *certified court interpreter* has achieved the highest level of expertise; a *language-skilled interpreter* has reached the same level of proficiency—but in a language for which no certification exam is available; and a *provisionally approved interpreter* has passed the oral performance exam and satisfied the other general prerequisites but is not yet certified in a spoken language for which a state-certifying exam is available. The rule amendments also require that a provisionally approved interpreter complete the process of becoming certified within two years of attending the orientation program. In addition, the rules stipulate that applicants selected as employee interpreters—if they are not certified at the time of court employment—are required to become certified within one year of being employed in a court interpreting position. Finally, the amended rules clarify that the certified court interpreter designation is the preferred designation when selecting court-appointed interpreters, when arranging for contractual interpreter services, and when making staff hiring decisions. ([This link goes to \*In Re: Amendments to the Florida Rules for Certification and Regulation of Court Interpreters.\*](#))



Judge Ilona Holmes, Seventeenth Circuit, conducts a continuing interpreter education program for 64 court interpreters from around the state; the focus of the program is Motions in Criminal Trial Court from Start to Finish.

As a result of the rule amendments, the court interpreter program now has greater leverage in encouraging court interpreters to become certified; the changes also strengthen the provision of interpreting services in the courts; help judges select the most qualified interpreters available for service in court proceedings; and eliminate the disparity in the qualifications interpreters are required to possess to perform interpreting services in Florida’s courts.

The judicial branch has also made progress in expanding its repertoire of approved continuing education programs. 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, nearly 90 continuing interpreter education programs have received board approval. Initially, all the approved programs were offered by private entities. But, before long, several circuits began developing trainings to meet the specific needs of their court interpreters: the Seventh, Ninth, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Judicial Circuits have all designed and received approval for homegrown education programs in the last few years. In the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, the Ninth Circuit offered programs on “Inside the Courts,” “Firearms and Ammunitions,” and “Remote Interpreting”; the Thirteenth presented a program on “Understanding Firearms”; and the Seventeenth conducted a workshop on “Motions in Criminal Trial Court from Start to Finish.”

Finally, the branch continues to work on the language access priorities it identified in the wake of the October 2012 National Language Access Summit. The Florida team that attended the summit proposed six recommendations for the supreme court’s consideration: designate a language access advisory committee to make policy recommendations to the court; enhance remote interpreting services; institute a grievance complaint process; evaluate existing standards and best practices; conduct outreach on collaborating with other entities (universities, national testing organizations) to expand interpreter resources; and enhance judicial education. The court approved all six recommendations, and the board has been applying its efforts to the first three so far: the Court Interpreter Board was granted expanded authority to serve as a language access advisory committee; it is developing a grievance process modelled after the ADA Accommodations and Grievance Procedure; and it is working with other court committees to expand the use of remote interpreting technology (the branch is currently piloting an advanced remote interpreting solution that enables four circuits to share their interpreting resources). Through initiatives like these, the branch advances its efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of language access services in Florida’s courts.

### Court Access for People with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which commemorated its twenty-fourth anniversary in July 2014, was promulgated to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities that are available to people without disabilities. Often referred to as the most significant piece of federal legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 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 themselves.

According to the most recent census data, approximately one in five people in the US report having one or more disabilities. Moreover, since the nation’s population is aging, and since the risk of having one or multiple disabilities increases with age, the number of people with disabilities is expected to increase in the coming years. This is of particular significance in Florida, the state with the highest rate of residents who are 65 years or older (18.7 percent of the population). To provide “meaningful access to Florida’s courts for all people,” Long-Range Issue #4 encourages the judicial branch to continue its endeavors to ensure that people with disabilities can effectively participate in court proceedings, programs, and services.

Since the enactment of the ADA, Florida’s court system has steadfastly exceeded the requirement that public entities with 50 or more employees assign at least one employee to coordinate ADA compliance: indeed, since 1990, each of Florida’s 20 circuits and five DCAs 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.



In the Eleventh Circuit, video remote interpreting is being utilized as a backup system to ensure that sign language interpreting services are available for certain hearings in the domestic violence, criminal, and juvenile courtrooms. Pictured here, an offsite sign language interpreter (seen on the laptop screen) communicates with a witness who is before Hearing Officer Norman Powell.

In 2006, the branch invigorated its efforts to minimize the effects of physical barriers to Florida's courts 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 obstacles in public areas of court facilities, worked with chief judges to create a Court Accessibility Team in each circuit and appellate court, 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 when funding has been constrained at the state and local levels, Florida's courts have continued to work steadily to eradicate hurdles that thwart access for people with disabilities.

In addition to reducing physical obstacles, the judicial branch strives to minimize communication barriers. In fiscal year 2013 – 14, for instance, the Eleventh Circuit implemented video remote interpreting (VRI) as a backup system to ensure that sign language interpreting services are available in all its domestic violence, criminal, and juvenile courtrooms for first appearance (weekday and weekend bond hearings), soundings, shelter hearings, etc. VRI is a video telecommunication service that uses devices like web cameras and videophones to provide sign language interpretation. With the system implemented in the Eleventh Circuit, a remote or offsite sign language interpreter can facilitate communication with a person in the courtroom who is deaf or hard of hearing. The interpreter hears the voices of the proceeding participants through a microphone and then translates the message into sign language, via a video camera. The recipient then signs his or her response into the camera, and the interpreter views it from the screen and speaks the aural interpretation into the microphone for the hearing persons. In fact, the Eleventh Circuit did not need to purchase any new equipment to provide sign language interpretation services in these courtrooms as it was able to implement VRI utilizing laptops with built-in cameras, microphones, and an internet connection.

Live interpreters will always be the first preference, for the judicial branch recognizes that VRI interpretation is not desirable for certain proceedings—for long hearings or for hearings involving children or people who have severe mental illnesses, for example. However, in emergency situations, and for hearings that are short in duration, when an in-person interpreter is not immediately available, VRI is a useful tool, enabling court proceedings to take place as scheduled and avoiding delays that could inconvenience court users, requiring them to take another day off from work or spend unnecessary time in jail, for instance.



To support ongoing efforts to ensure that their courts provide meaningful access for all people, the ADA coordinators in each circuit and appellate court have maintained a tradition (for eight years now) of bimonthly conference calls, which 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. One of the speakers for the 2013 – 14 fiscal year gave a presentation on the *2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design*—a timely choice because several courts were planning for improvements to or a replacement of their buildings. And another speaker talked about the services offered by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, which works with local communities and private providers to support people who have developmental disabilities and their families in living, learning, and working in their communities; in addition to connecting participants with services and support, the agency provides job training and job coaches for those seeking employment. Inspired by this conference call, the Eleventh Circuit's ADA coordinator facilitated the court's hiring of one of the agency's Employment Enhancement Project participants for a paid internship position—and the court benefited from the intern's services, while he gained the experience he needs to seek competitive employment in the future.

Finally, with the economy showing promising signs of improvement, the state and counties have more resources with which to address their courthouses' ADA-related concerns, and they have earmarked funding for making needed improvements to existing structures and for replacing dilapidated ones. For fiscal year 2014 – 15, for instance, lawmakers provided funding for building system upgrades that will render the Third DCA more accessible. They also provided appropriations for a new courthouse in Washington County and for a new Fourth DCA courthouse; constructed in compliance with the *2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design*, these buildings will be readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

## 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 the long-range plan comprises are considered equally and comparably important—as well as inexorably intertwined. But Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence is named last of the five because its successful realization depends, in many ways, on the branch's success in addressing the long-range issues that come before it. To promote the people's trust and confidence in their court system, in other words, the judicial branch must make palpable progress in its efforts to Strengthen Governance and Independence, Improve the Administration of Justice, Support Competence and Quality, and Enhance Court Access and Services. As this report has demonstrated, the branch continues to make advances in these areas.

A second way the branch works to earn the people's trust and confidence is by operating in keeping with the five fundamental values that inform the judicial branch vision: that "Justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable." The court system remains committed to meaningfully embodying these values.

The judicial branch strives to be **accessible** 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 embrace of new technologies that enable the electronic transmission of court records and that facilitate the public's digital access to court information (see Long-Range Issue #2 and #4).

The judicial branch seeks to be **fair** 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 (see Long-Range Issue #3 and #4).

The judicial branch aims to be **effective** through its determination to establish a stable, permanent funding source; through its strategies for improving the management of the court system; through its advances in developing a comprehensive electronic courts structure to improve the efficiency of, and access to, the courts 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 the expansion of problem-solving dockets; and through its high-quality education and training opportunities, which support the efforts of judges and court personnel to capably carry out the challenging work of the courts (see Long-Range Issue #1, #2, and #3).

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

And the judicial branch strives to be **accountable** 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 results while saving taxpayer dollars (see Long-Range Issue #1 and #2).

Yet a third way the branch seeks to earn the public's trust and confidence is through creating opportunities for the people of Florida to learn about their courts. Studies have routinely 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. The accounts below highlight some of the many initiatives the branch has designed to provide Floridians with positive, meaningful interactions with the courts.

### Education and Outreach Initiatives

#### Campaign Conduct Forums

The Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums, established in 1998, are typically offered in the spring of election years for circuits 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 value of integrity and professionalism among candidates for judicial office, the impact of campaign conduct on public trust and confidence in the justice system, and the chilling 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. In 2014, on May 8 and 9, forums were held in 10 cities throughout the state.

#### Annual Reporters Workshop

For 25 years, 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 participate by their editors. Sessions are led by justices, judges, attorneys, professors, and seasoned reporters.

The October 2013 workshop included sessions on effective techniques of reporting high-profile cases, public records, court and bar resources on the internet, libel law and defamation, lawyer regulation, merit retention, civics education, and journalism in the world of social media. Because the public continues to get most of its information about the court system from traditional news sources, the branch recognizes the importance of playing a proactive role in deepening news reporters’ understanding of the court system; this workshop provides reporters with a very helpful introduction to covering justice system issues.



Justice Barbara J. Pariente and Justice Jorge Labarga talk to the Reporters Workshop participants about merit retention.

#### 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



Judge Simone Marstiller, First DCA, and Chief Judge Charles Francis, Second Circuit, participate in a Reporters Workshop session on Covering the Courts: A Candid Discussion with Judges.

schools—as well as 412 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.](#))

This year, Justice Lewis, together with Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, received the 2014 Sandra Day O'Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education for their joint work on Florida's Justice Teaching Initiative and other civics education programs in which they have been involved. The award was conferred by the National Center for State Courts.



Justice R. Fred Lewis and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, received the 2014 Sandra Day O'Connor Award for Advancement of Civics Education, conferred by the National Center for State Courts. The award recognizes them for their joint work on Florida's Justice Teaching Initiative and several other civics education programs in which they have been involved in Florida.

### Justice Teaching Institute

The Justice Teaching Institute—initially designed in response to a national study documenting the public's lack of, and need for, court-related information—was first offered in 1997, when then Chief Justice Gerald Kogan conceived it as part of the Florida Supreme Court's Sesquicentennial Celebration. Since then, each year, the institute selects 20 – 25 secondary school teachers from across the state to participate in a comprehensive, five-day education program on the



Justices with the 2014 Justice Teaching Institute fellows in the supreme court courtroom.

fundamentals of the judicial branch. The program is sponsored and hosted by the supreme court, subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation, and coordinated by the Florida Law Related Education Association.

Taught primarily by the seven justices, two “mentor judges” (in spring 2014, Judge Kelly McKibbin, Eighteenth Circuit, and Judge Douglas Henderson, Manatee County), and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, the institute delves into the structure and functions 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 value 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. The teachers, whose enthusiasm truly is infectious, have educated and inspired generations of young people about the history, roles, and consequence of the Third Branch. The institute is one of the court system’s most promising efforts to introduce school children to the vital role courts play in society. ([For more information about the Justice Teaching Institute, follow this link.](#))



Playing the part of justices, the 2014 Justice Teaching Institute fellows listen intently during the mock oral argument.

## Visiting the Courts: Oral Arguments and Education Tours and Programs

Every circuit and appellate court in Florida offers a compelling range of programs and activities that inform the public about the court system—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” and “inside the courts” programs, jury appreciation events, adoption events, speakers bureaus, public opinion surveys, citizen advisory committees, and media outreach efforts. These activities are devised to educate people from all walks of life about the judicial branch, bolster court-community relationships, and enhance people’s trust and confidence in their justice system. ([Take this link to a compilation of court-community relations activities by circuit and DCA.](#))

In addition, visitors to the state capital can take advantage of a variety of options for learning about the history and purpose of Florida’s highest court and the fundamentals of Florida’s court system.

One of the most engrossing ways to become familiar with the inner workings of the supreme court is to attend oral arguments—a “conversation” between the justices and attorneys, during which the attorneys clarify the legal reasons for their position and answer questions posed by the justices. Oral arguments are held 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. [\(Take this link to information about oral argument and the oral argument schedule.\)](#)



Children participating in the Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day delight in their visit to the conference room in which the justices meet and deliberate.

Those who cannot attend oral arguments or who are interested in seeing archived ones (going back to 1997) can view them online via WFSU’s *Gavel to Gavel*. [\(Take this link to Gavel to Gavel.\)](#) Also available online is information about high-profile supreme court cases. [\(This link goes to information about high-profile cases and other high-profile matters.\)](#)



High school students compete in a moot court competition before the supreme court justices.

The Florida Supreme Court also offers tours and educational programs for student groups (from fourth graders through college students) and for citizen groups of all ages. Several different tour options are available. Groups of six or more visitors who are at least high-school age can take the 45-minute Educational Tour, a guided tour that brings the history of the court alive with intriguing facts about the building and about its inhabitants past and present. An alternative for smaller groups or those with less time is the Building Tour, which is designed for all age groups; this fast, concise walking tour through the rotunda, portrait gallery, courtroom, and library offers visitors a brief introduction to the supreme court, focusing on the courthouse, the justices, and tidbits of court history. And the third option is the self-guided tour, which is ideal for individuals, small groups, and those who prefer to go at their own pace: furnished with informational brochures, these tour-goers learn about the public areas of the building (courtroom, library, rare book room, lower rotunda, portrait gallery, and Lawyer’s Lounge).

Student groups also have two different educational activities from which to choose. The Educational Program, for fourth graders through college students, includes both a tour of the building and a talk that takes place in the supreme court courtroom, focusing on the judicial branch, Florida’s court system, the differences between trial and appellate courts, and the role of the justices and how they are appointed and retained.

The other education program is the highly-popular Mock Oral Argument Experience: students spend the first part of this 90-minute program learning about the judicial branch and Florida’s court system; then, led by a staff attorney or trained volunteer, the students, playing the part of justices, attorneys, the clerk, and the marshal, act out an oral argument on an age-suitable hypothetical case (the court offers 19 cases from which to choose). This activity is designed for fifth graders all the way up through college students.

All told, in the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, the court conducted 94 Educational Programs and guided 27 student groups through the Mock Oral Argument Experience. Between them, the two programs reached 5,270 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 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. [\(Take this link to get more information about these education programs.\)](#)

### Florida Supreme Court Library and Archives

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 assistance from law firms and other law libraries in the state and around the country. The



In honor of Mediation Week, fifth graders from Chaires Elementary School in Tallahassee created a “Let’s Peace it Together” handmade quilt as a reminder to use mediation and not violence. Under the theme “Peaceful Schools Build Peaceful Communities,” these students set out to change the world. The quilt is currently on display in the Florida Supreme Court Library.

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 admire 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 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. ([Follow this link to visit the law library’s website.](#))

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

Thanks to the enduring partnership between the historical society and the library, the archives continue to flourish. The collection now includes papers of 26 justices and comprises more than 1,000 boxes of records, including “office files” (e.g., justices’ administrative papers, professional correspondence, texts of speeches, notes from their work on court committees, and personal papers) and “opinion files” (i.e., work products of the court). The holdings also include the work of a number of court commissions, the 1966 Constitution Revision Commission papers, and papers related to the revision of section 14 to Article V of the Florida Constitution (commonly referred to as Revision 7). ([Take this link to discover what is housed in the archives.](#))

During the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, the supreme court archivist began inventorying the papers of former Justice James Alderman, which were donated in 1985 but sealed until 2010; former Justice Stephen H. Grimes donated a large body of scrapbook items related to his life and legal career; and OSCA donated another trove of papers connected with Revision 7. In addition, the *Evolution of Justice* booklet, another joint project of the library and the Florida Supreme Court Historical Society, was revised and made available online. This 40-panel exhibit booklet, beautifully illustrated with drawings, photographs, and documents (some dating as far back as the 1500s), provides insight into the development of Florida’s judicial system. The booklet grew out of an exhibit that former Chief Justice Harry Lee Anstead conceived in 2002 to “educate the public about the history of our state’s judiciary and to strengthen confidence in Florida’s Courts System.” Continuing her predecessor’s vision of an historical and educational outreach program, the next chief justice, Barbara J. Pariente, proceeded with an exhibit and the first edition of this booklet in 2004. ([This link goes to the \*Evolution of Justice\* booklet.](#))



This photo shows some of the boxes of archived materials donated by Justice Ben F. Overton; Justice Overton, who served on the supreme court from 1974 – 1999 and passed away in December 2012, donated 123 boxes of records—the largest donation to the archives at this time.

### Court Publications

To familiarize people with the judicial branch and to enhance communication between the courts and other justice system entities, the legislature, and the executive branch, OSCA’s 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.](#)) In addition, in the spring, summer, and winter, the Publications Unit publishes 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.](#))

## Transitions

### Passing of the Gavel to Chief Justice Jorge Labarga

The chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court is chosen by majority vote of the justices for a term of two years. On June 30, 2014, Chief Justice Ricky Polston passed the gavel to Justice Jorge Labarga, who, on July 1, became the supreme court's fifty-sixth chief justice since Florida achieved statehood in 1845. Chief Justice Labarga is the first Cuban-American—indeed, the first person of Hispanic descent—to lead the state judicial branch.

Chief Justice Labarga was appointed to the supreme court on January 1, 2009. Before this appointment, he worked as an assistant public defender, an assistant prosecutor, a private attorney, and a trial court judge with the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit; he also served as an appellate court judge for one day: he was appointed to the Fourth DCA in December 2008—but, the day after he started his new position, the governor selected him to serve on the Florida Supreme Court.



On July 1, 2014, Justice Jorge Labarga became the supreme court's fifty-sixth chief justice since Florida achieved statehood in 1845. He is the first Cuban-American—and the first person of Hispanic descent—to lead the state judicial branch.

At the passing of the gavel ceremony, the outgoing chief justice called Chief Justice Labarga a man “whose background underscores this state’s diversity, its commitment to representation of all its citizens, and its enduring faith in the principles of liberty and equal justice enshrined in our state and federal constitutions.” Thus it is no surprise that one of the new chief justice’s priorities is Access to Justice for all Floridians. As Chief Justice Labarga has noted, access to justice for lower income and disadvantaged people is a critical challenge for the legal system: federal and state funding for legal aid services has declined considerably over the last few years, and the Florida Interest on Trust Accounts Program, which also provides funds in support of civil legal assistance for the poor, has experienced severely reduced revenue as a result of historic low interest rates. The result is that only 20 percent of indigent people are able to receive legal counsel for their civil disputes. Moreover, about 60 percent of working-class Floridians do not qualify for legal aid and cannot afford to hire an attorney. The situation is reaching a crisis point, and Chief Justice Labarga expressed his deep concern about it.

In partnership with The Florida Bar and The Florida Bar Foundation, the chief justice is working to establish a Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice that will bring together the courts, The Florida Bar, civil legal aid funders and providers, the business community, and other stakeholders in a coordinated effort to identify and remove barriers to civil justice for disadvantaged, low-income, and moderate-income Floridians. The commission will consider Florida’s legal assistance delivery system as a whole, including staffed legal aid programs, resources and support for self-represented litigants, limited scope representation, pro bono services, and other models and potential innovations. The chief justice’s

vision is for the commission to develop strategies for addressing the unmet civil legal needs of Floridians, mobilize leaders at the highest levels of the courts and bar and community, build shared ongoing institutional commitments to address access to justice issues in a coordinated and collaborative way, and raise the visibility of access to justice efforts. Appealing to everyone in the crowded courtroom that historic day on which he became the chief administrative officer of the judicial branch, Chief Justice Labarga said, "I hope all of you will participate and help me in that endeavor."



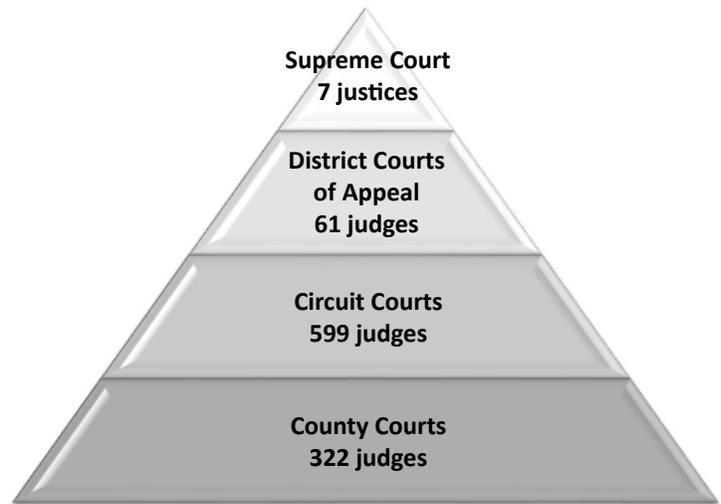
Justices of the Florida Supreme Court. Seated (l – r) are Justice Pariente, Chief Justice Labarga, and Justice Lewis; standing (l – r) are Justice Polston, Justice Quince, Justice Canady, and Justice Perry.

# 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 auxiliary agencies of the court, national court research and planning agencies, the legislative branch, the executive branch, the public, and media.



Note: In the 2014 legislative session, lawmakers approved funding for three new DCA judgeships—two for the Second DCA and one for the Fifth DCA—which increased the number of DCA judges to 64.

## 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

(Note: In the 2014 legislative session, lawmakers approved funding for three new DCA judgeships—two for the Second DCA and one for the Fifth DCA—which increased the number of DCA judges to 64.)

## 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/>

## Trial Court Administrators

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

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

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

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

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

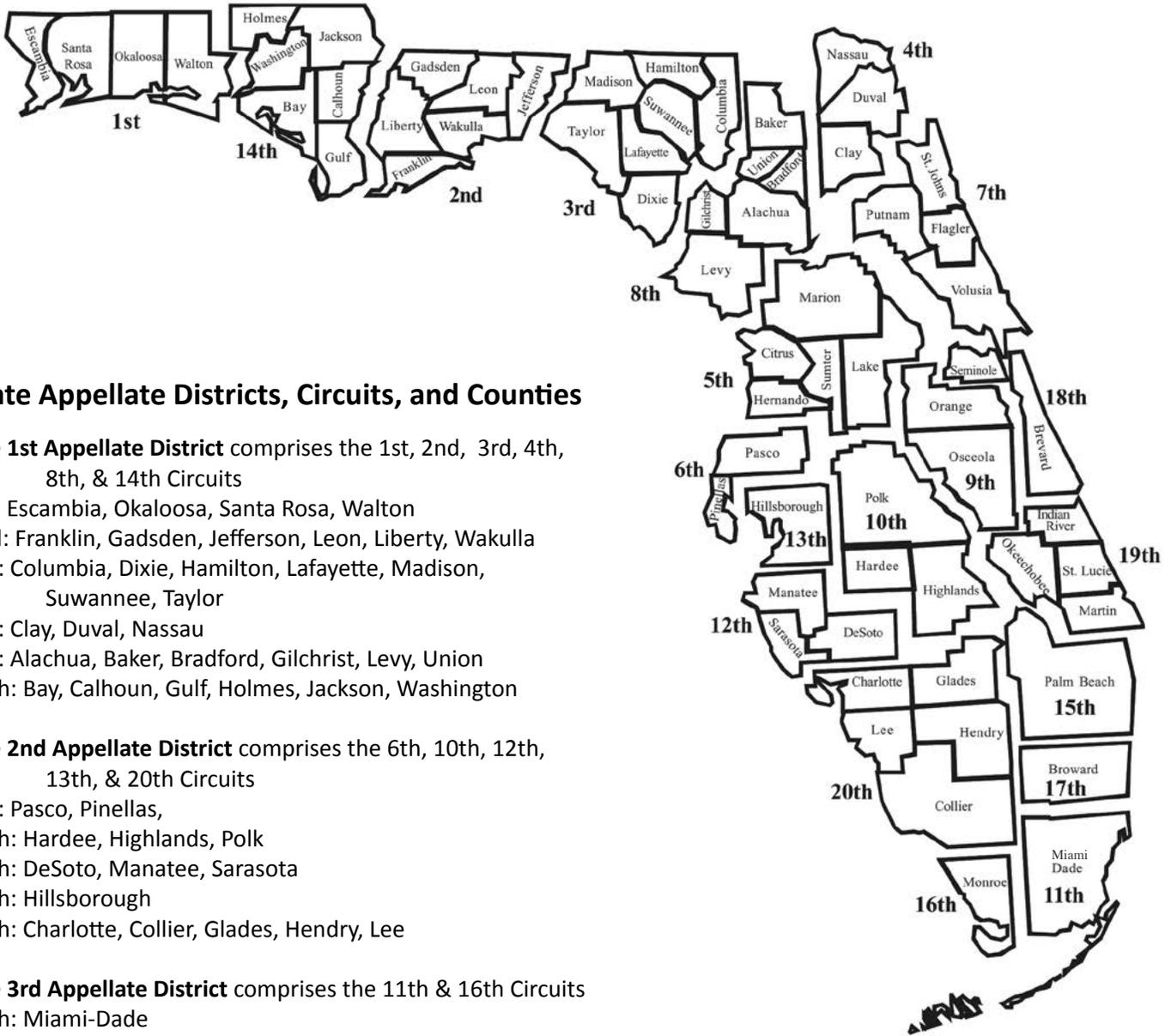


Lisa Goodner, who was appointed Florida's state courts administrator in 1993, retired on June 30, 2014.



The supreme court selected Patricia "PK" Jameson to serve as the state courts administrator.

# 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
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
2014	3	3	3	100%	64

## Circuit

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
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
2014	24	7	0	0%	599

## County

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
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
2014	42	39	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.

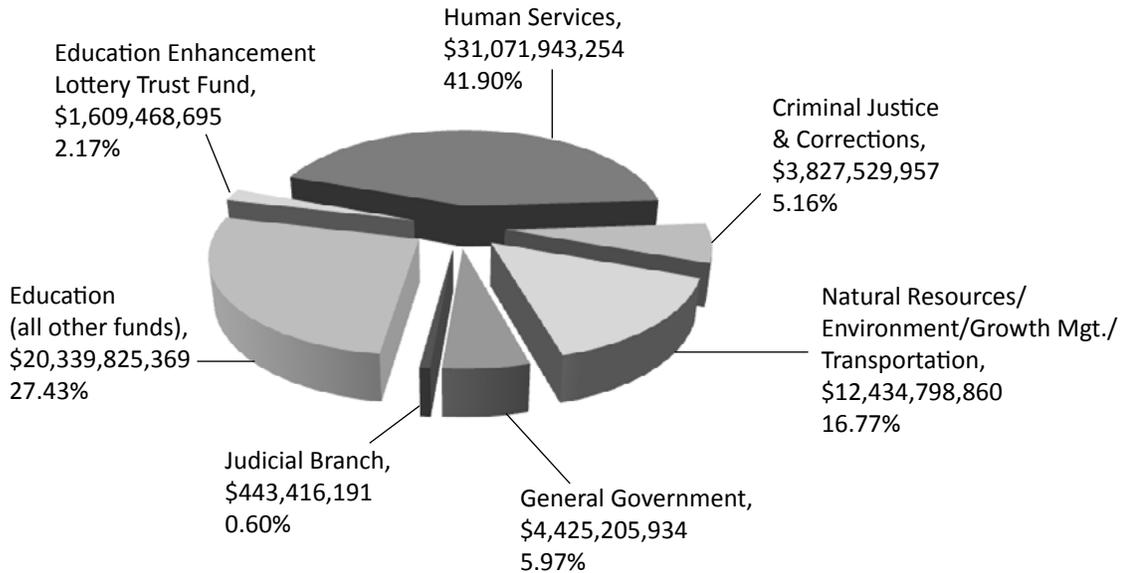
The need for additional judgeships remains high for several reasons: an absence of funding for previously certified judgeships, overall increases in judicial workload, and fewer support staff. If judicial workload continues to exceed capacity and the judicial need deficit is not addressed, likely consequences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

In a December 2013 opinion, the Florida Supreme Court certified the need for 49 additional judges: three appellate judges, seven circuit judges, and 39 county court judges. The Florida Legislature approved funding for three new appellate judgeships this year ([take this link to the opinion](#)).

# FLORIDA'S BUDGET

## 2013-2014 Fiscal Year Appropriations

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



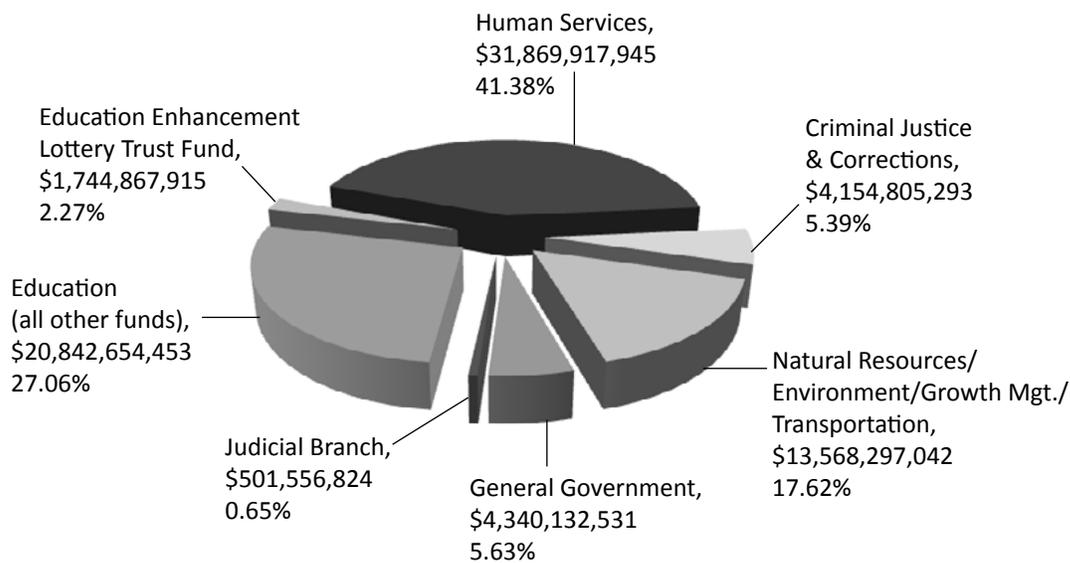
**Total: \$74,152,188,260**

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

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

## 2014-2015 Fiscal Year Appropriations

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



**Total: \$77,022,232,003**

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

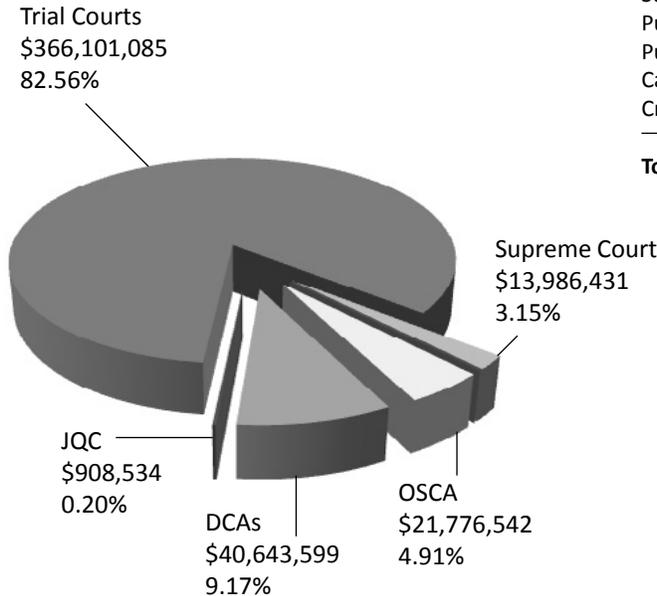
# STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS

## 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
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



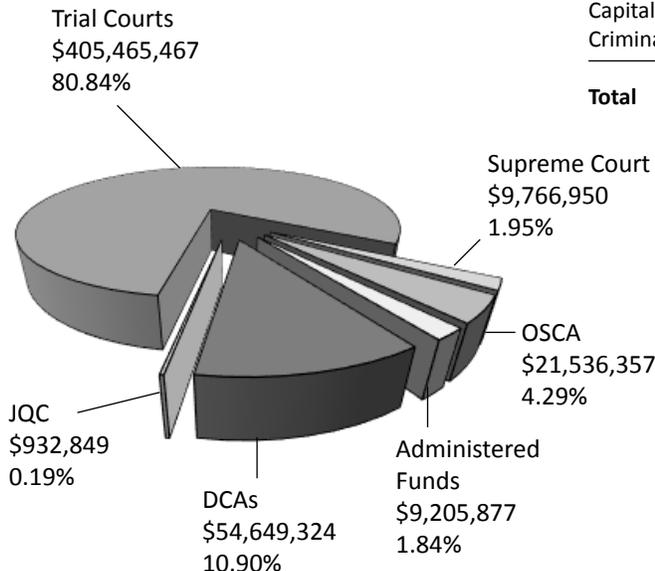
**State Courts System Total: \$443,416,191** This total reflects those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 1500, less vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$4.6 million for pass through/legislative (member) project funding not sought in the judicial branch's legislative budget request as well as \$16.5 million in nonrecurring funds.]

## Justice System Appropriations 2014-2015 Fiscal Year

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

State Courts System	\$501,556,824
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$93,801,837
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$43,395,725
State Attorneys	\$424,965,890
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$207,568,866
Public Defenders Appellate	\$15,136,592
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$8,928,104
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$41,480,310

**Total** \$1,336,834,148



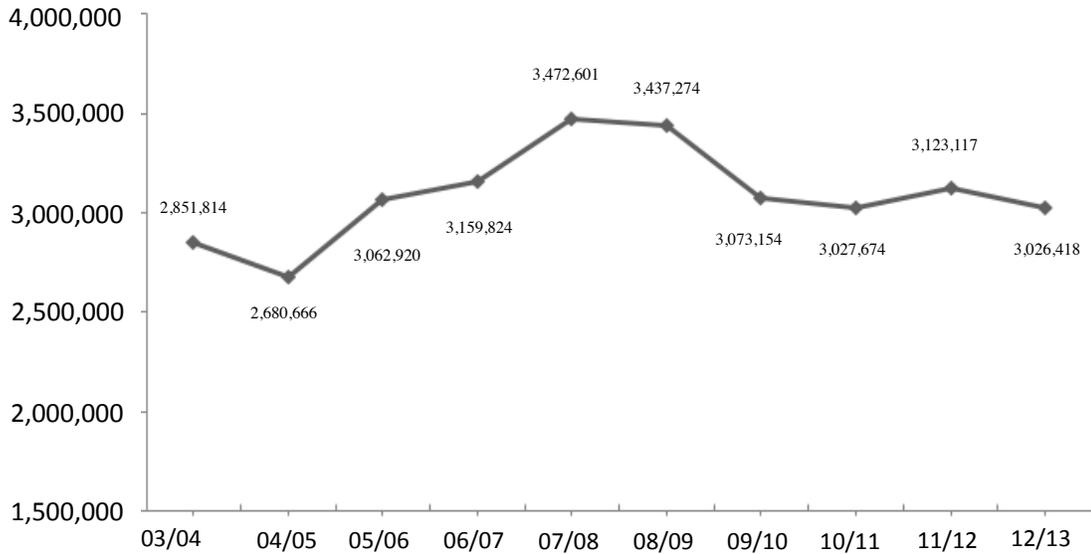
**State Courts System Total: \$501,556,824** This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, HB 5001, less vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$24.2 million for pass through/legislative (member) project funding not sought in the judicial branch's legislative budget request; \$23.6 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$33.3 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to fiscal year 2013 – 14 increased costs in employee benefits.]

# FILINGS

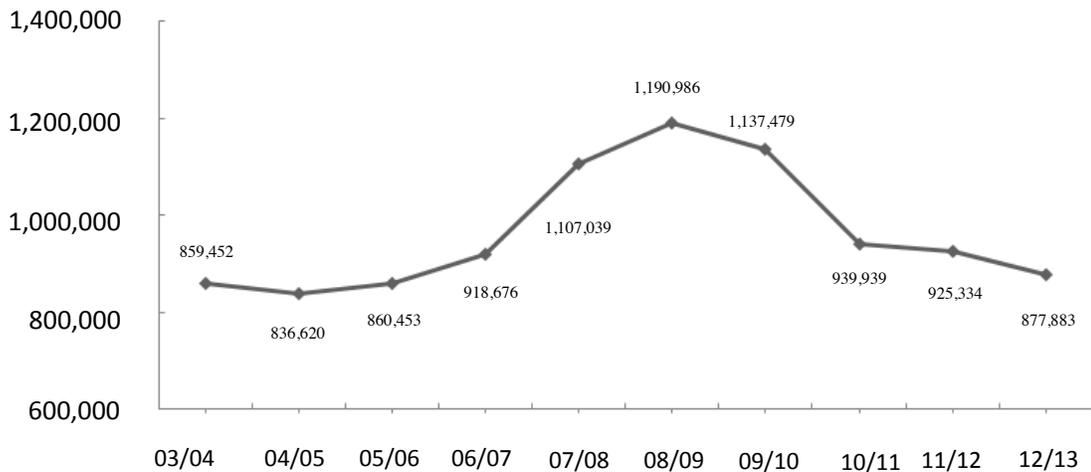
## Filings, Florida's Trial Courts FY 2003/04 to 2012/13

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

### County Courts



### Circuit Courts

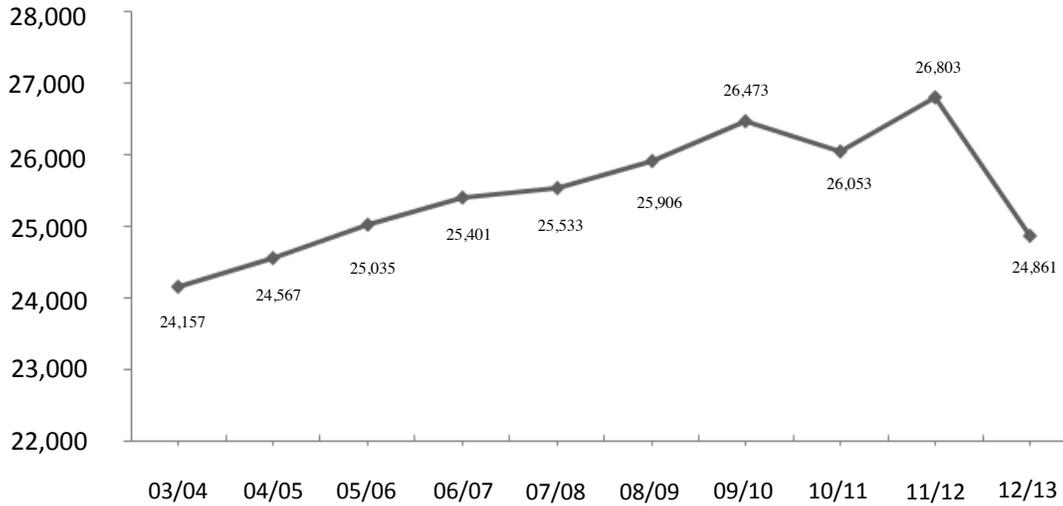


# FILINGS

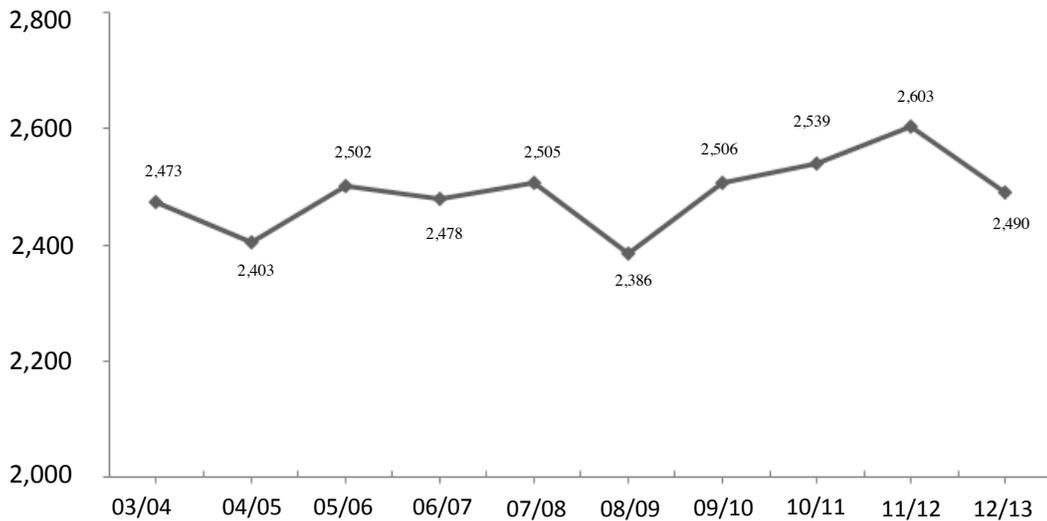
## Filings, Florida's Appellate Courts FY 2003/04 to 2012/13

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

### District Courts



### Supreme Court



# DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

## DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

Notice of Appeal and Petition FY 2012-13

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

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
All	Administrative	1,084
All	Civil	6,102
All	Criminal	9,342
All	Criminal Post Conviction*	5,305
All	Family	1,382
All	Juvenile	1,185
All	Probate/Guardianship	230
All	Workers' Compensation	231
		<b>24,861</b>

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
1	Administrative	728	3	Administrative	95	5	Administrative	75
	Civil	1,160		Civil	1,369		Civil	858
	Criminal	2,343		Criminal	743		Criminal	2,126
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,102		Criminal Post Conviction*	720		Criminal Post Conviction*	1,082
	Family	267		Family	153		Family	341
	Juvenile	218		Juvenile	271		Juvenile	171
	Probate/Guardianship	16		Probate/Guardianship	48		Probate/Guardianship	40
	Workers' Compensation	231			<b>3,399</b>			<b>4,693</b>
		<b>6,065</b>						
						Total		<b>24,861</b>
2	Administrative	83	4	Administrative	103			
	Civil	1,256		Civil	1,459			
	Criminal	2,519		Criminal	1,611			
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,577		Criminal Post Conviction*	824			
	Family	291		Family	330			
	Juvenile	311		Juvenile	214			
	Probate/Guardianship	44		Probate/Guardianship	82			
		<b>6,081</b>			<b>4,623</b>			

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

## TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

FY 2012-13

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

Circuit	County	Division	Total Filings
All	All	Adult Criminal	186,845
All	All	Civil	294,252
All	All	Family Court*	289,613
All	All	Probate	107,173
All	All	County Adult Criminal	717,144
All	All	County Civil**	2,309,274
			<b>3,904,301</b>

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

## TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION

FY 2012-13

Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings
1	Adult Criminal	11,591	8	Adult Criminal	4,307	15	Adult Criminal	8,426
	Civil	8,266		Civil	3,605		Civil	22,142
	Family Court*	13,136		Family Court*	6,037		Family Court*	15,278
	Probate	4,763		Probate	2,189		Probate	7,485
	County Adult Criminal	25,873		County Adult Criminal	18,001		County Adult Criminal	64,306
	County Civil**	29,327		County Civil**	29,054		County Civil**	221,248
	<b>92,956</b>		<b>63,193</b>		<b>338,885</b>			
2	Adult Criminal	4,819	9	Adult Criminal	17,024	16	Adult Criminal	1,314
	Civil	5,449		Civil	24,259		Civil	1,286
	Family Court*	5,831		Family Court*	23,771		Family Court*	1,960
	Probate	3,136		Probate	5,340		Probate	448
	County Adult Criminal	13,639		County Adult Criminal	47,889		County Adult Criminal	3,715
	County Civil**	28,876		County Civil**	137,288		County Civil**	11,063
	<b>61,750</b>		<b>255,571</b>		<b>19,786</b>			
3	Adult Criminal	2,519	10	Adult Criminal	9,510	17	Adult Criminal	16,393
	Civil	1,873		Civil	9,532		Civil	32,387
	Family Court*	4,161		Family Court*	14,961		Family Court*	26,736
	Probate	1,093		Probate	4,815		Probate	9,315
	County Adult Criminal	6,083		County Adult Criminal	29,484		County Adult Criminal	55,028
	County Civil**	13,697		County Civil**	37,350		County Civil**	344,712
	<b>29,426</b>		<b>105,652</b>		<b>484,571</b>			
4	Adult Criminal	11,072	11	Adult Criminal	17,393	18	Adult Criminal	8,519
	Civil	15,940		Civil	47,882		Civil	13,424
	Family Court*	19,095		Family Court*	33,631		Family Court*	13,319
	Probate	5,579		Probate	11,391		Probate	5,018
	County Adult Criminal	43,009		County Adult Criminal	101,734		County Adult Criminal	34,253
	County Civil**	133,243		County Civil**	767,964		County Civil**	71,929
	<b>227,938</b>		<b>979,995</b>		<b>146,462</b>			
5	Adult Criminal	10,297	12	Adult Criminal	7,389	19	Adult Criminal	5,171
	Civil	16,110		Civil	9,843		Civil	9,117
	Family Court*	14,478		Family Court*	10,021		Family Court*	8,987
	Probate	7,012		Probate	6,002		Probate	4,141
	County Adult Criminal	25,223		County Adult Criminal	22,364		County Adult Criminal	19,486
	County Civil**	46,865		County Civil**	39,785		County Civil**	43,188
	<b>119,985</b>		<b>95,404</b>		<b>90,090</b>			
6	Adult Criminal	15,748	13	Adult Criminal	12,197	20	Adult Criminal	8,396
	Civil	21,602		Civil	18,065		Civil	17,036
	Family Court*	20,357		Family Court*	22,121		Family Court*	16,010
	Probate	8,778		Probate	6,611		Probate	6,890
	County Adult Criminal	48,698		County Adult Criminal	58,544		County Adult Criminal	42,700
	County Civil**	71,266		County Civil**	130,693		County Civil**	67,600
	<b>186,449</b>		<b>248,231</b>		<b>158,632</b>			
7	Adult Criminal	9,688	14	Adult Criminal	5,072	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,904,301</b>
	Civil	12,811		Civil	3,623			
	Family Court*	14,048		Family Court*	5,675			
	Probate	5,471		Probate	1,696			
	County Adult Criminal	41,293		County Adult Criminal	15,822			
	County Civil**	63,235		County Civil**	20,891			
	<b>146,546</b>		<b>52,779</b>					

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

## TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, AND DIVISION

FY 2012-13

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

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
1 Escambia	Adult Criminal	6,907	Leon	Adult Criminal	3,280	Madison	Adult Criminal	303
	Civil	3,288		Civil	4,058		Civil	186
	Family Court*	6,141		Family Court*	3,908		Family Court*	370
	Probate	2,753		Probate	2,355		Probate	100
	County Adult Criminal	11,338		County Adult Criminal	10,095		County Adult Criminal	755
County Civil**	11,138	County Civil**	20,874	County Civil**	3,918			
		<b>41,565</b>			<b>44,570</b>			<b>5,632</b>
Okaloosa	Adult Criminal	2,458	Liberty	Adult Criminal	131	Suwannee	Adult Criminal	576
	Civil	2,248		Civil	91		Civil	362
	Family Court*	3,626		Family Court*	150		Family Court*	1,104
	Probate	1,140		Probate	25		Probate	218
	County Adult Criminal	7,533		County Adult Criminal	215		County Adult Criminal	1,005
County Civil**	9,285	County Civil**	334	County Civil**	1,656			
		<b>26,290</b>			<b>946</b>			<b>4,921</b>
Santa Rosa	Adult Criminal	1,518	Wakulla	Adult Criminal	444	Taylor	Adult Criminal	335
	Civil	1,647		Civil	496		Civil	212
	Family Court*	2,323		Family Court*	628		Family Court*	495
	Probate	611		Probate	114		Probate	145
	County Adult Criminal	3,956		County Adult Criminal	777		County Adult Criminal	987
County Civil**	6,250	County Civil**	1,361	County Civil**	1,143			
		<b>16,305</b>			<b>3,820</b>			<b>3,317</b>
Walton	Adult Criminal	708	3 Columbia	Adult Criminal	897	4 Clay	Adult Criminal	2,178
	Civil	1,083		Civil	693		Civil	2,418
	Family Court*	1,046		Family Court*	1,408		Family Court*	3,129
	Probate	259		Probate	474		Probate	575
	County Adult Criminal	3,046		County Adult Criminal	2,311		County Adult Criminal	4,805
County Civil**	2,654	County Civil**	4,189	County Civil**	8,058			
		<b>8,796</b>			<b>9,972</b>			<b>21,163</b>
2 Franklin	Adult Criminal	348	Dixie	Adult Criminal	128	Duval	Adult Criminal	8,166
	Civil	248		Civil	98		Civil	12,657
	Family Court*	279		Family Court*	300		Family Court*	14,728
	Probate	81		Probate	83		Probate	4,776
	County Adult Criminal	653		County Adult Criminal	385		County Adult Criminal	35,331
County Civil**	728	County Civil**	1,134	County Civil**	122,642			
		<b>2,337</b>			<b>2,128</b>			<b>198,300</b>
Gadsden	Adult Criminal	461	Hamilton	Adult Criminal	223	Nassau	Adult Criminal	728
	Civil	445		Civil	258		Civil	865
	Family Court*	706		Family Court*	317		Family Court*	1,238
	Probate	494		Probate	47		Probate	228
	County Adult Criminal	1,504		County Adult Criminal	499		County Adult Criminal	2,873
County Civil**	4,158	County Civil**	1,399	County Civil**	2,543			
		<b>7,768</b>			<b>2,743</b>			<b>8,475</b>
Jefferson	Adult Criminal	155	Lafayette	Adult Criminal	57	5 Citrus	Adult Criminal	969
	Civil	111		Civil	64		Civil	1,850
	Family Court*	160		Family Court*	167		Family Court*	1,935
	Probate	67		Probate	26		Probate	848
	County Adult Criminal	395		County Adult Criminal	141		County Adult Criminal	2,703
County Civil**	1,421	County Civil**	258	County Civil**	3,652			
		<b>2,309</b>			<b>713</b>			<b>11,957</b>

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
Hernando	Adult Criminal	2,573	St. Johns	Adult Criminal	1,349	9 Orange	Adult Criminal	14,158
	Civil	3,121		Civil	2,408		Civil	18,763
	Family Court*	2,531		Family Court*	2,532		Family Court*	19,069
	Probate	1,903		Probate	815		Probate	4,246
	County Adult Criminal	4,435		County Adult Criminal	5,368		County Adult Criminal	35,822
	County Civil**	10,750		County Civil**	8,520		County Civil**	112,379
		<b>25,313</b>			<b>20,992</b>			<b>204,437</b>
Lake	Adult Criminal	2,554	Volusia	Adult Criminal	5,938	Osceola	Adult Criminal	2,866
	Civil	4,240		Civil	8,118		Civil	5,496
	Family Court*	4,000		Family Court*	8,831		Family Court*	4,702
	Probate	1,650		Probate	3,781		Probate	1,094
	County Adult Criminal	7,506		County Adult Criminal	28,674		County Adult Criminal	12,067
	County Civil**	16,681		County Civil**	46,922		County Civil**	24,909
		<b>36,631</b>		<b>102,264</b>			<b>51,134</b>	
Marion	Adult Criminal	3,471	8 Alachua	Adult Criminal	2,496	10 Hardee	Adult Criminal	451
	Civil	4,886		Civil	2,261		Civil	212
	Family Court*	5,269		Family Court*	3,607		Family Court*	522
	Probate	2,232		Probate	1,594		Probate	99
	County Adult Criminal	8,943		County Adult Criminal	13,561		County Adult Criminal	1,268
	County Civil**	12,104		County Civil**	23,017		County Civil**	1,562
		<b>36,905</b>		<b>46,536</b>			<b>4,114</b>	
Sumter	Adult Criminal	730	Baker	Adult Criminal	425	Highlands	Adult Criminal	925
	Civil	2,013		Civil	279		Civil	1,162
	Family Court*	743		Family Court*	686		Family Court*	1,747
	Probate	379		Probate	158		Probate	1,001
	County Adult Criminal	1,636		County Adult Criminal	1,088		County Adult Criminal	2,356
	County Civil**	3,678		County Civil**	1,193		County Civil**	3,706
		<b>9,179</b>		<b>3,829</b>			<b>10,897</b>	
6 Pasco	Adult Criminal	4,180	Bradford	Adult Criminal	599	Polk	Adult Criminal	8,134
	Civil	7,738		Civil	265		Civil	8,158
	Family Court*	6,966		Family Court*	442		Family Court*	12,692
	Probate	2,552		Probate	96		Probate	3,715
	County Adult Criminal	11,812		County Adult Criminal	1,370		County Adult Criminal	25,860
	County Civil**	20,215		County Civil**	2,722		County Civil**	32,082
		<b>53,463</b>		<b>5,494</b>			<b>90,641</b>	
Pinellas	Adult Criminal	11,568	Gilchrist	Adult Criminal	155	11 Miami-Dade	Adult Criminal	17,393
	Civil	13,864		Civil	149		Civil	47,882
	Family Court*	13,391		Family Court*	326		Family Court*	33,631
	Probate	6,226		Probate	73		Probate	11,391
	County Adult Criminal	36,886		County Adult Criminal	398		County Adult Criminal	101,734
	County Civil**	51,051		County Civil**	437		County Civil**	767,964
		<b>132,986</b>		<b>1,538</b>			<b>979,995</b>	
7 Flagler	Adult Criminal	799	Levy	Adult Criminal	429	12 DeSoto	Adult Criminal	461
	Civil	1,492		Civil	492		Civil	282
	Family Court*	1,343		Family Court*	738		Family Court*	573
	Probate	538		Probate	184		Probate	104
	County Adult Criminal	3,530		County Adult Criminal	1,194		County Adult Criminal	939
	County Civil**	4,230		County Civil**	1,309		County Civil**	1,762
		<b>11,932</b>		<b>4,346</b>			<b>4,121</b>	
Putnam	Adult Criminal	1,602	Union	Adult Criminal	203	Manatee	Adult Criminal	3,709
	Civil	793		Civil	159		Civil	4,182
	Family Court*	1,342		Family Court*	238		Family Court*	4,787
	Probate	337		Probate	84		Probate	1,702
	County Adult Criminal	3,721		County Adult Criminal	390		County Adult Criminal	9,411
	County Civil**	3,563		County Civil**	376		County Civil**	13,517
		<b>11,358</b>		<b>1,450</b>			<b>37,308</b>	

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

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

# COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
Sarasota	Adult Criminal	3,219	15 Palm Beach	Adult Criminal	8,426	Okeechobee	Adult Criminal	644
	Civil	5,379		Civil	22,142		Civil	489
	Family Court*	4,661		Family Court*	15,278		Family Court*	838
	Probate	4,196		Probate	7,485		Probate	151
	County Adult Criminal	12,014		County Adult Criminal	64,306		County Adult Criminal	1,611
	County Civil**	24,506		County Civil**	221,248		County Civil**	1,347
		<b>53,975</b>			<b>338,885</b>			<b>5,080</b>
13 Hillsborough	Adult Criminal	12,197	16 Monroe	Adult Criminal	1,314	St. Lucie	Adult Criminal	2,247
	Civil	18,065		Civil	1,286		Civil	4,381
	Family Court*	22,121		Family Court*	1,960		Family Court*	4,186
	Probate	6,611		Probate	448		Probate	2,249
	County Adult Criminal	58,544		County Adult Criminal	3,715		County Adult Criminal	8,797
	County Civil**	130,693		County Civil**	11,063		County Civil**	26,782
		<b>248,231</b>			<b>19,786</b>			<b>48,642</b>
14 Bay	Adult Criminal	3,246	17 Broward	Adult Criminal	16,393	20 Charlotte	Adult Criminal	1,961
	Civil	2,464		Civil	32,387		Civil	2,638
	Family Court*	3,141		Family Court*	26,736		Family Court*	3,028
	Probate	1,030		Probate	9,315		Probate	1,838
	County Adult Criminal	12,360		County Adult Criminal	55,028		County Adult Criminal	5,445
	County Civil**	13,749		County Civil**	344,712		County Civil**	5,895
		<b>35,990</b>			<b>484,571</b>			<b>20,805</b>
Calhoun	Adult Criminal	179	18 Brevard	Adult Criminal	5,525	Collier	Adult Criminal	1,472
	Civil	98		Civil	7,585		Civil	4,032
	Family Court*	342		Family Court*	8,261		Family Court*	3,320
	Probate	53		Probate	2,898		Probate	1,804
	County Adult Criminal	253		County Adult Criminal	20,441		County Adult Criminal	8,866
	County Civil**	595		County Civil**	25,050		County Civil**	16,485
		<b>1,520</b>			<b>69,760</b>			<b>35,979</b>
Gulf	Adult Criminal	135	Seminole	Adult Criminal	2,994	Glades	Adult Criminal	144
	Civil	222		Civil	5,839		Civil	75
	Family Court*	251		Family Court*	5,058		Family Court*	217
	Probate	109		Probate	2,120		Probate	31
	County Adult Criminal	394		County Adult Criminal	13,812		County Adult Criminal	377
	County Civil**	254		County Civil**	46,879		County Civil**	1,158
		<b>1,365</b>			<b>76,702</b>			<b>2,002</b>
Holmes	Adult Criminal	314	19 Indian River	Adult Criminal	1,162	Hendry	Adult Criminal	541
	Civil	152		Civil	2,167		Civil	355
	Family Court*	454		Family Court*	1,831		Family Court*	546
	Probate	85		Probate	918		Probate	116
	County Adult Criminal	686		County Adult Criminal	2,549		County Adult Criminal	2,203
	County Civil**	1,218		County Civil**	6,020		County Civil**	1,924
		<b>2,909</b>			<b>14,647</b>			<b>5,685</b>
Jackson	Adult Criminal	787	Martin	Adult Criminal	1,118	Lee	Adult Criminal	4,278
	Civil	396		Civil	2,080		Civil	9,936
	Family Court*	1,019		Family Court*	2,132		Family Court*	8,899
	Probate	305		Probate	823		Probate	3,101
	County Adult Criminal	1,581		County Adult Criminal	6,529		County Adult Criminal	25,809
	County Civil**	3,737		County Civil**	9,039		County Civil**	42,138
		<b>7,825</b>			<b>21,721</b>			<b>94,161</b>
Washington	Adult Criminal	411				Total		<b>3,904,301</b>
	Civil	291						
	Family Court*	468						
	Probate	114						
	County Adult Criminal	548						
	County Civil**	1,338						
		<b>3,170</b>						

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

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

# COURT CONTACTS FOR 2014-2015

## FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

**Chief Justice JORGE LABARGA** (850) 413-8371  
Clerk John A. Tomasino (850) 922-5215  
Marshal Silvester Dawson (850) 414-8950  
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 J. Daniel McCarthy (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) 242-2033  
Clerk Lon Weissblum (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) 577-4422  
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  
Interim Court Administrator Jon Lin (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, JR.** (352) 374-3644  
Court Administrator Ted McFetridge (352) 374-3638  
Website <http://www.circuit8.org>

### 9th Judicial Circuit

Orange and Osceola counties  
**Chief Judge FREDERICK J. LAUTEN** (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>

### 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 MENEDEZ, JR.** (813) 272-5022  
Court Administrator Mike Bridenback (813) 272-5894  
Website <http://www.fljud13.org/>

# COURT CONTACTS FOR 2014-2015

## 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) 355-7845  
 Court Administrator Barbara L. Dawicke (561) 355-1872  
 Website <http://15thcircuit.co.palm-beach.fl.us/>

## 16th Judicial Circuit

Monroe County  
**Chief Judge LUIS M. GARCIA** (305) 852-7165  
 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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