

# Supreme Court of Florida

No. AOSC23-35

IN RE: JUDICIAL CIRCUIT ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

## ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Under article V, section 9 of the Florida Constitution, when the Court determines that there is a need to increase, decrease, or redefine judicial circuits, it must certify its findings and recommendations to the Legislature. The constitution requires the Court to have adopted uniform criteria to guide its determination. Consistent with these constitutional mandates, Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.241 sets out detailed factors for the Court’s consideration. The rule also gives the Court an overarching instruction to “balance the potential impact and disruption caused by changes in judicial circuits ... against the need to address circumstances that limit the quality and efficiency of, and public confidence in, the judicial process.” Under the rule, before recommending a change in “judicial structure,” the Court must consider “less disruptive adjustments” to judicial branch operations.

By letter dated June 15, 2023, Speaker Paul Renner of the Florida House of Representatives has asked the Court to consider whether a consolidation of our state's existing judicial circuits is warranted. As the letter notes, the current boundaries of our judicial circuits have been in place since 1969, notwithstanding the significant population and demographic changes of the past 50 years. Speaker Renner suggests that consolidation of judicial circuits might generate substantial cost savings and increase public trust and confidence in the judiciary through greater efficiency and uniformity in the judicial process.

Without expressing any view on the merits at this time, the Court agrees that the question of whether there is a need to consolidate Florida's judicial circuits deserves thoughtful consideration and careful study. To that end, and to aid the Court in making its ultimate determination, the Court believes it would be beneficial to appoint an assessment committee as contemplated by rule 2.241. The Court's specific instructions and charges to the Judicial Circuit Assessment Committee are as follows:

1. the Committee must limit its findings and recommendations to whether there is a need to consolidate (i.e., reduce the number of) Florida's judicial circuits;
2. in making its findings and recommendations, the Committee must assume that district court of appeal boundaries will remain unchanged;
3. the Committee's findings and recommendations must be governed by the criteria set out in rule 2.241; and
4. before making its findings and recommendations, the Committee must confer with the chief judges and other representatives of the courts, court budget commissions, The Florida Bar, and the public, as required by rule 2.241, as well as with other justice system entities it deems appropriate.

The Court asks that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the chief justice, through the state courts

administrator, by December 1, 2023. If, despite its best efforts, the Committee is unable to settle on findings and recommendations by that date, the Committee should so inform the Court.

The following individuals are appointed to the Judicial Circuit Assessment Committee for a term to expire on March 29, 2024:

The Honorable Stacy M. Butterfield  
Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller, Polk County

The Honorable Keith A. Carsten  
Circuit Court Judge, Ninth Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Shawn Crane  
Chief Judge-Elect, Sixth Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Jonathan D. Gerber  
Appellate Judge, Fourth District Court of Appeal

Mr. W. Braxton Gillam, IV  
Attorney at Law, Jacksonville

The Honorable Glenn Kelley  
Chief Judge, Fifteenth Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Christopher Kelly  
Circuit Court Judge, Seventh Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Robert W. Lee  
County Court Judge, Broward County

Mr. Laird A. Lile  
Attorney at Law, Naples

The Honorable Carlos J. Martinez  
Public Defender, Eleventh Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Diana L. Moreland  
Chief Judge-Elect, Twelfth Judicial Circuit

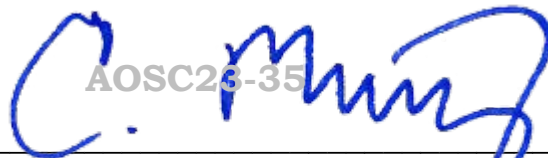
The Honorable Melissa W. Nelson  
State Attorney, Fourth Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Linda L. Nobles  
Circuit Court Judge, First Judicial Circuit

The Honorable Margaret O. Steinbeck  
Circuit Court Judge, Twentieth Judicial Circuit

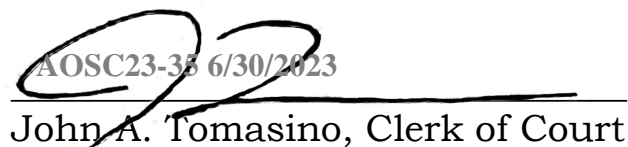
The Honorable Jonathan D. Gerber will serve as Chair of the Committee. The Office of the State Courts Administrator will provide staff support.

DONE AND ORDERED at Tallahassee, Florida, on June 30, 2023.



Chief Justice Carlos G. Muñoz

ATTEST:

  
John A. Tomasino, Clerk of Court

AOSC23-35 6/30/2023

