



FLORIDA STATE COURTS

2015-2016

Annual Report



View of the oculus (skylight) from the rotunda of the Florida Supreme Court Building.

As in the ancient Roman Pantheon Building after which the Florida Supreme Court Building is modeled, the oculus, literally the “eye” of the building, is said to shine down into the depths of human affairs.

THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

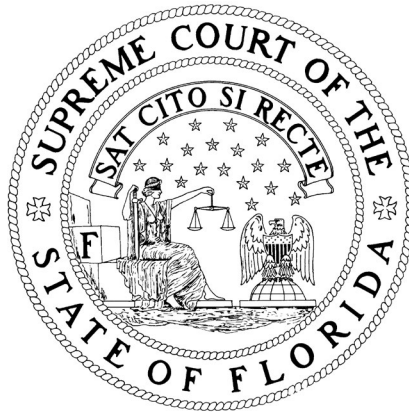
**Florida State Courts Annual Report
July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016**



Jorge Labarga
Chief Justice

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

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Mission

The mission of the judicial branch is to protect rights and liberties,
uphold and interpret the law,
and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Vision

Justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable.

To be **accessible**, the Florida justice system will be convenient, understandable,
timely, and affordable to everyone.

To be **fair**, the Florida justice system will respect the dignity of every person,
regardless of race, class, gender or other characteristic, apply the law appropriately
to the circumstances of individual cases, and include judges and court staff who
reflect the community's diversity.

To be **effective**, the Florida justice system will uphold the law and apply rules and
procedures consistently and in a timely manner, resolve cases with finality, and
provide enforceable decisions.

To be **responsive**, the Florida justice system will anticipate and respond to the needs
of all members of society, and provide a variety of dispute resolution methods.

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

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

Message from the Chief Justice

I have worked nearly four decades in Florida courts – as an assistant public defender, as a prosecutor, as a private litigator, as a trial judge, as a Supreme Court justice and, for the last three years, as Florida’s chief justice.

If I could share one thing – just one single thing – with people who don’t have much first-hand knowledge of Florida’s court system, it would be this:

Florida’s courts do good.

They do immense good in the lives of individual people who are hurt or in trouble. And they do immeasurable good simply by fulfilling the roles they play in our democracy and our society, dispensing justice, confirming the rule of law and providing an essential check and balance in our government. As citizens of our state and our great country, we all know this and I’m sure we all feel a deep gratitude for the amazing legacy we have received from the Founders and the generations that followed them.

But to function as they do, courts must have the trust and confidence of the people they serve. This foundation of public trust is strengthened as citizens gain more knowledge and understanding of their courts. As chief justice, it is my sincere hope that people will learn more about Florida’s courts by exploring this annual report on our state’s judiciary. Many dedicated employees – not just judges! – work in this branch of government to make it possible for citizens to have a place to seek justice.

Don’t be hesitant. This report is written for a wide audience – Florida’s judges and court staff, certainly, but also all the people they serve. I’m confident that readers who peruse this report will come away with greater understanding of and greater trust in their courts. And I thank you, very sincerely, for the time and attention you give to this annual report.

What will you find in the following pages? In this opening message, I will mention only a few highlights, topics that I believe will interest many people. I encourage you to browse through the entire report to discover the wide array of informative articles and graphics on court initiatives and programs in the fiscal year stretching from July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2016.

The first issue I want to draw to your attention: our efforts to bring down the barriers that confront too many people when they seek meaningful access to civil justice. As proud as I am of the good that courts do, I know that they can and must do more, much more – most particularly when it comes to civil justice. Legal aid initiatives and programs, as committed and hard-working as they are, have the capacity to meet only a fraction of the needs of poor people confronting important problems in their lives without the counsel of an attorney. But that’s only part of the problem! Even people with moderate incomes many times cannot afford an attorney.

That was why the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice was created in late 2014. The problem is a multi-faceted one that needs the concerted creativity of leaders from across our society, which is why the



Access Commission includes people from all branches of Florida government as well as lawyers, legal aid experts and, importantly, the business community. I promise you, the members of the Access Commission are determined to bridge the gap that keeps some citizens from meaningful access to the justice intended for all. As its term was expiring in the summer of 2016, the Access Commission recommended that the Florida Supreme Court approve establishing a standing Access to Civil Justice Commission. And so the work goes on.

There's a second group I want to point out: the Judicial Management Council. Don't be deceived by the mild-sounding name! This is a seriously cool group of people. Made up of 16 judges, lawyers and other public leaders, the JMC is charged with keeping on top of developing trends and potential crises – and with figuring out how the courts can cope with whatever challenges arise. The JMC produced two very important reports in late 2015, both of which were unanimously approved by the Florida Supreme Court:

- “Justice: Fair and Accessible to All” is the long-range strategic plan the JMC drafted after much hard work, including listening to input at public forums around the state and reviewing the nearly 6,000 responses submitted by attorneys, witnesses, victims, defendants, jurors, court staff, court clerks, and members of the general public;
- “Delivering Our Message / Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida” is a comprehensive plan that acknowledges the need to keep abreast of the evolving world of communication tools. However, it also emphasizes the necessity of age-old principles essential to any healthy communication dynamic – building and maintaining relationships of trust and training for emergencies and other stressful and demanding events, such as high-profile trials and hearings.

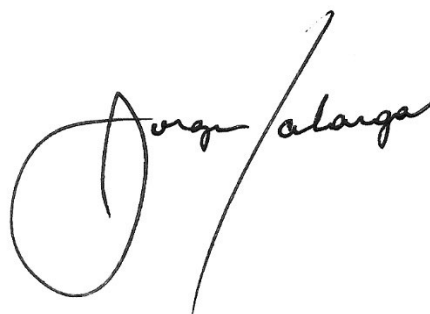
As a quick aside, this annual report is itself an excellent example of the importance of both traditional and cutting-edge communication tools!

Just a few quick points before I close this opening message. In this annual report, you will find articles about “problem-solving courts” which certainly will convince you, if I have not, that courts do good. You will read about exciting developments in court technology and initiatives on court security. And you will find basic information about the structure of our court system, which consists of two levels of trial courts and two levels of appellate courts.

It has been my honor to serve as the head of Florida's judiciary – and I am excited to continue in that role for a second two-year term as chief justice.

I want to finish by expressing my deep respect for and gratitude to the men and women who work in Florida's courts – some inside the courtrooms but many more out of sight, in an office down the hall or on another floor. Together they helped Florida's trial and appellate courts bring more than 3.7 million cases to a conclusion in the fiscal year that stretched from July 2015 through June 2016.

Many of these millions of cases were complex, difficult and painful – but every one of them was important to the people who brought them to court. We who work in Florida's courts never lose sight of that.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jorge Alarza". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline that extends across the name.

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Jorge Labarga ***Chief Justice***

Justice Labarga was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in January 2009; he is the second Hispanic to sit on the court. He is the court's fifty-sixth chief justice of Florida and is currently serving his second term as chief justice.

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.



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

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

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

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

Peggy A. Quince *Justice*

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

Born in 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

Ricky Polston *Justice*

Justice Polston was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in October 2008, and he served as chief justice from 2012 – 2014.

A native of Graceville, Florida, Justice Polston grew up on a farm that raised peanuts, watermelon, and cattle. He began his professional life as a certified public accountant: he received his BS in accounting from Florida State University in 1977 and developed a thriving career (in fact, he is still a licensed CPA). Nine years later, he received his law degree, also from Florida State University. He then went into private practice, where he handled cases in state, federal, and appellate court. He remained in private practice until his appointment to the First District Court of Appeal in 2001, where he served until he was appointed to the Supreme Court.



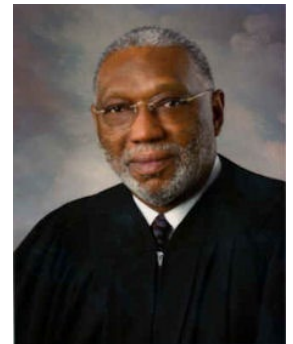
Justice Polston and his wife, Deborah Ehler Polston, are the parents of ten children: in addition to their four biological children, they are raising a sibling group of six children whom they adopted from the state's foster care system.

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.

[For more information about the Florida Supreme Court justices, please follow this link](#)

FLORIDA'S SUPREME COURT JUSTICES



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

FLORIDA'S NEWEST JUSTICE

C. Alan Lawson *Justice*

Justice Lawson was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in December 2016.

A native of Lakeland, Florida, Justice Lawson received his AA from Tallahassee Community College, his BS from Clemson University, and his JD from Florida State University. After nine years in private practice and four years as an assistant county attorney for Orange County, Florida, he was appointed a circuit judge in the Ninth Judicial Circuit, where he served from 2002 – 2005. Then in 2006, he was appointed to the Fifth District Court of Appeal; his colleagues selected to be the court's chief judge in 2015, and he served in that capacity until his appointment to the supreme court.



In addition to his volunteer work for various civic organizations, Justice Lawson has been involved in numerous bar and extrajudicial activities over the years: among them, he taught for the Florida Judicial College and served on the Florida DCA Budget Commission and the Florida Courts Technology Commission, and he was a member of the Florida Bar's Appellate Practice Section, the Rules of Criminal Procedure Committee, and the Code and Rules of Evidence Committee.

Justice Lawson and his wife, Julie Carlton Lawson, have two children.



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

July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016: The Year in Review

“Courts must have the trust and confidence of the people we serve if we are to fulfill our constitutional role,” Chief Justice Jorge Labarga emphasized in his 2016 State of the Judiciary address. And the best way to earn trust and confidence, he continued, is to “better inform the public about the judicial branch’s role, mission, and vision” through “improved communication, collaboration, and education efforts....We must make sure that the customers of our court system understand on a daily basis the importance of the Third Branch of government and of the determined efforts we make to achieve justice.”

In the past, he reflected, the courts relied on traditional news media, primarily newspapers, “to tell our story to the public.” And for many years, that model was highly effective. But these days, because most people go elsewhere for their news, the courts have to find other ways to “tell the people of Florida what they need to know about our judiciary.” So “The bottom line is that we must start telling our own story using every tool at our disposal.” And that includes “adapting to the twenty-first century’s methods of communicating,” he added.

The Florida State Courts Annual Report, in conjunction with the recently published [Short History of Florida State Courts Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#), is one of the many tools the branch uses to tell its own story. The narrative threads that the annual report unwinds are organized around the five long-range issues identified in the *Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch: 2016 – 2021*. Long-range issues are defined as the high-priority areas that the branch, in seeking to fulfill its mission and reach toward its vision, must address over the long term. [\(This link goes to the branch’s 2016 – 2021 long-range plan.\)](#) The five long-range issues are as follows:

- *Deliver justice effectively, efficiently, and fairly;*
- *Enhance access to justice and court services;*
- *Improve understanding of the judicial process;*
- *Modernize the administration of justice and operation of court facilities;*
- *Maintain a professional, ethical, and skilled judiciary and workforce.*

This report, in endeavoring to heighten readers’ knowledge and understanding of the purposes, roles, and responsibilities of Florida’s judicial branch, aspires to bolster people’s trust and confidence in their courts.

Long-Range Issue #1:

Deliver Justice Effectively, Efficiently, and Fairly

Florida’s people depend on their court system to make fair, reliable, and prompt case decisions. The administration of justice requires deliberate attention to each case, a well-defined process to minimize delay, and the appropriate use of limited resources. It is important that the Florida judicial branch continue to implement practices which utilize resources effectively, efficiently, and in an accountable manner while continuing its commitment to fairness and impartiality.

In this age of increasingly complex workloads and limited resources, Florida’s judicial branch is acutely aware of the need to govern itself effectively, efficiently, accountably, and fairly—goals that rely, to a great extent, on having revenues adequate to support its legislatively-authorized budget. Thus, to achieve these goals, in addition to working resolutely to ensure that the judiciary has sufficient and stable funding, courts system leaders are steadfast in their efforts to strengthen the governance and policy development structures of the branch.

State Courts System Funding

Judges and court staff are committed to using resources as carefully as possible, always looking for innovative ways to achieve greater efficiency and enhanced performance through technology and other time- and cost-saving measures. Even so, the need for sufficient and stable funding of Florida’s courts is abiding.



When court funding is not adequate, not only are judges, staff, and courtrooms affected—but so are the individuals, families, and businesses that depend on the courts to resolve disputes and achieve justice. For a lack of sufficient and stable funding for staff, buildings, technology, and other resources can lead to delays in the processing of cases that are important to the lives of individuals and to the livelihoods of businesses; also affected are the state’s aging courthouses, which often have safety or security issues that can put people in harm’s way; a dearth of adequate resources can also jeopardize opportunities to modernize and enhance court operations, which maximize the taxpayers’ investment in their justice system.

Suitable and dependable funding ensures that court users can have their needs met, expediently and safely, when they come through the courthouse doors, as hundreds of thousands do each year.

Therefore, branch leaders encourage the state to invest in the people, places, and tools that are necessary to operate the courts system effectively and efficiently for the benefit of those the judiciary serves.

Historically, Florida’s courts have received less than 1 percent of the state’s total budget each year. For more information about the history of state courts system funding, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 1).

Funding for the 2015 – 16 Fiscal Year

Since the 2013 – 14 fiscal year, when Florida enjoyed its first budget surplus in six years, lawmakers have been working with a surplus. In FY 2015 – 16, from its \$78.3 billion budget, lawmakers appropriated \$516.3 million to the judicial branch, representing an increase of 3 percent over the previous year’s budget. [Note: this figure included \$13.9 million for pass through/legislative project funding, i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts’ core mission and not requested by the courts; \$17.4 million in nonrecurring funds for building needs; and \$6.2 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2014 – 15 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]



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

Suitable and dependable funding ensures that court users can have their needs met, expediently and safely, when they come through the courthouse doors, as hundreds of thousands do each year. Therefore, branch leaders encourage the state to invest in the people, places, and tools that are necessary to operate the courts system effectively and efficiently for the benefit of those the judiciary serves.

The 2015 – 16 judicial branch budget included \$2 million for additional case managers; \$750,000 for court interpreters; funding for additional senior judge days; and funding for the statewide replacement of hardware for the courts system’s network infrastructure. Funding was also provided to address facilities issues for the Third and Fifth DCAs and to advance to the next phase of construction for a new Fourth DCA building.

However, the branch’s top budget priority—recurring funds to address recruitment, retention, and equity issues affecting court personnel and to make judicial salaries more competitive—was not funded. Also not funded was the branch’s

request for \$25.6 million as part of a comprehensive plan to address technology needs of the trial courts related to case processing, due process, and achieving a minimum level of technology services statewide.

Funding for the 2016 – 17 Fiscal Year

In FY 2016 – 17, from its \$82.2 billion budget, lawmakers appropriated \$521.7 million to the judicial branch. [Note: this figure includes \$20.4 million for pass through/legislative project funding, i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts; \$19.2 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$2.8 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2016 – 17 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Over the last three years or so, the branch has faced challenges being in the same allocation of appropriations monies as agencies with high-profile exigencies (e.g., the Department of Corrections faces inmate safety issues and also has unmet maintenance and repair needs that have created security risks; and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement is endeavoring to work through a significant backlog of sexual assault kits and also needs additional investigators to examine use of force incidents by law enforcement officers and suspicious Department of Corrections prison deaths). Ultimately, lawmakers must decide what they consider the most pressing needs for allocation of limited funds.

That said, the legislature did not fund the judicial branch's top budget priority: a pay issue for court staff and judges (specifically, the branch requested recurring funds for the second phase of a strategy to address recruitment, retention, and equity issues affecting court employees; the branch had also requested a positive salary increase for judges as part of a multi-year strategy to restore judicial salaries to a competitive level).

But the branch as a whole did have a number of successes in the 2016 session related to infrastructure projects for some of the DCAs, such as critical and significant funding to complete the renovation project at the Third DCA and the construction of a new courthouse for the Fourth DCA. Furthermore, branch leaders received positive feedback on information supporting trial court requests, including the trial court technology strategic plan. (For more information about the technology plan, please see the [Short History](#), p. 52).

Also included in the budget was funding for several pass through/legislative projects (i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts). For example, funding was included in the FY 2016 – 17 trial court budget for issues such as funding for children's advocacy centers and treatment funding for substance abuse. In addition, the legislature provided funding for establishing or expanding problem-solving courts (drug court, veterans treatment court, and mental health court).

But in the end, the trial courts sustained a total reduction of \$2.7 million, in part due to "historical reversions" (i.e., the branch, to ensure no breaks in trial court operations, tends to budget conservatively; thus, it typically does not spend all the funds it is allocated by the legislature. In this case, lawmakers reduced the branch's general revenue authority as a result). Costs, particularly in the areas of expert witnesses and court interpreting, are rising. The Trial Court Budget Commission is implementing practices to enhance monitoring of spending so that resources can be deployed to meet the greatest needs and to maximize resources throughout the year.

Note: State economists forecast a small revenue surplus in the 2017 – 18 FY but anticipate a budget deficit for the 2018 – 19 and the 2019 – 20 fiscal years.



Judicial Management Council

For more than six decades, the judicial branch has benefitted from the guidance of its judicial management councils (JMCs), which are described as high-level management consultants to the supreme court. Established in November 2012, the current JMC—which is the branch’s fifth—was conceived as a “forward-looking advisory body to deftly assist the chief justice and the supreme court in proactively identifying trends, potential crisis situations, and means to address them.” The council’s first chair, then Chief Justice Ricky Polston, referred to the JMC as the “headlights of the branch, shining a high beam toward the future.” The council’s current chair, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, calls the JMC “the workhorse of the judicial branch.” For more information about the branch’s management councils, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 5).



Chief Justice Jorge Labarga (on right), who chairs the Judicial Management Council, welcomes council members while Justice Ricky Polston and Judge Jonathan Gerber, Fourth DCA, look on.

The current JMC was designed to function as a nimble body that has the ability to respond quickly and vigorously to challenges facing the branch. This dexterity is achieved through the creation of workgroups that are charged with specific tasks and are sunsetted when their tasks are complete. Initially, the council chair established three workgroups: Access to Justice; Performance; and Education and Outreach. The following year, he created the Long-Range Strategic Planning Workgroup.

The Access to Justice Workgroup continues to focus on the development and implementation of interactive, web-based “interviews” to facilitate self-represented litigants’ access to the courts. The software that has been developed for this initiative, called the Do It Yourself (DIY) Florida Project, operates much like tax preparation software: after guiding users through a series of questions, it generates the appropriate court document that is ready to be reviewed, edited if necessary, and filed through the e-portal. Thus far, the workgroup has focused on developing interviews for small claims cases, landlord-tenant (evictions) cases, and some simple dissolution matters in the family law area. After the workgroup completes its review of these interviews, the project will go into the test phase.

Meanwhile, the Performance Workgroup, the Education and Outreach Workgroup, and the Long-Range Strategic Planning Workgroup fulfilled their directives:

~The Performance Workgroup reviewed filing and disposition trends by case type and level of work and made recommendations to the court about how to meet future branch needs for uniform and consistent data reporting and analysis in some crucial performance areas;

~The Education and Outreach Workgroup updated the branch-wide communication plan; the plan was approved by the court, and implementation began in January 2016. ([This link goes to Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida.](#)) For more information about the communication plan and its implementation process, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p.32);

~And the Long-Range Strategic Planning Workgroup revised the branch’s long-range plan; the plan received the court’s approval in late 2015, and in January 2016, steps began to implement it. ([Take this link to The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch 2016 – 2021.](#)) For more information about the long-range plan and its antecedents, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 9).

As three of the JMC’s first four projects were nearing completion, council members, who met to consider succeeding areas of focus, expressed universal concern about trial court security, and they recommended that this be one of the next priorities for the council. In large part, this recommendation came in response to one of the goals of the 2016 – 2021 long-range plan, which stresses the need to “Protect all judges, court personnel, court users, and facilities through effective security, emergency preparedness, and continuity of operations plans.” But their recommendation was also

a reaction to the increasing incidences of mass violence across the globe. Indeed, as Chief Justice Labarga reported in his June 2016 State of the Judiciary Address, in the last 34 years, 81 mass shootings occurred in this country, 44 of which have taken place in the last decade; at the same time, the US has seen a rise in anti-government violence, including a dramatic increase in security threats and violent incidents in court buildings. To address the safety of the public, judicial officers, and court personnel, Chief Justice Labarga created the Trial Court Security Workgroup in August 2016; he appointed Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, to chair it.



Council members discuss an issue at a recent meeting; pictured here (l-r) are Judge Robert Morris, Second DCA; Judge Richard Suarez, Third DCA; Judge Robert W. Lee, Broward County; and Mr. Frank J Smith.



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

Among its charges, the workgroup will evaluate security procedures, practices, and perceptions at Florida’s courthouses; review national courthouse security procedures and consult with professionals and experts on model practices; identify important elements of security in trial court facilities; develop standards, model procedures, and recommendations for appropriate training; establish criteria for a statewide reporting system for security incidents; and identify effective partnerships and opportunities for partnerships in providing and promoting security in courthouses. To advance these goals, the chief justice plans direct outreach to county governments, including personal visits to local county commissioners and sheriffs wherever needed. (Note: the appellate courts already had a task force to address their security issues; in September 2015, the supreme court created the Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security to develop standards of operation and best practices relating to the safety and security of the supreme court and the DCAs.)

Then in October 2016, also in response to an issue the branch is newly encountering, the chief justice created the Guardianship Workgroup under the JMC. In the last two years, the Florida legislature passed laws to increase the state’s regulation and oversight of

guardians and enacted measures designed to curb abuses. Thus when the chief justice established the workgroup, he emphasized that “This is an appropriate time to re-evaluate our system and determine if the courts are doing everything possible to meet the needs of everyone involved.” Toward this end, the Guardianship Workgroup will examine judicial procedures and best practices pertaining to guardianship to ensure that courts are best protecting the person, property, and rights of people who have been judged to be incapacitated and people who may have diminished capacity to function independently. And it will also study guardianships in the court system with the goal of improving accountability to better protect these vulnerable people. To



The Guardianship Workgroup is chaired by Judge Olin Shinholser (ret.), Tenth Circuit (second from the left); here, workgroup members are engaged in a brainstorming exercise centering on the significant events in a guardianship proceeding.

chair the workgroup, the chief justice appointed Judge Olin Shinholser (retired), who served on the bench of the Tenth Circuit for 26 years.

Among its responsibilities, the workgroup will consider the use of least restrictive alternatives that address specific functional limitations; determinations of incapacity; restoration of capacity; the assessment and assignment of costs associated with guardianship administration; post adjudicatory proceedings and responsibilities related to guardianship, including the rights guaranteed by Florida law; and training opportunities available to judges and court staff. The workgroup will provide the supreme court with a report evaluating guardianship practices and recommending ways to enhance the guardianship process (an interim report is due by October 2017, and a final report is due by September 2018).

Performance and Accountability

In the late 1990s, 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 ensure that they use public resources efficiently and in a way that the public can understand. In response to the increasing workload demands on these committees, the supreme court divided them from the Judicial Management Council in 2002, establishing each as a discrete commission.

The Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability (DCAP&A), currently chaired by Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A), currently chaired by Judge Diana Moreland, Twelfth Circuit, 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 undergirds several of the goals identified in the long-range plan. In particular, these bodies support branch efforts to "utilize caseload and other workload information to manage resources and promote accountability" (goal 1.3); "ensure the fair and timely resolution of all cases through effective case management" (goal 1.2); and "encourage the use of consistent practices, procedures, and forms statewide" (goal 1.5). Below are the major initiatives in which these commissions, often in collaboration with other commissions or committees, are involved.



Judge Vance Salter, Third DCA, chairs the Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability.

Commission on District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability

Joint Workgroup on Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Appeals Issues

Since 2011, the DCAP&A has been responsible for monitoring performance measures for dependency and termination of parental rights appeals cases with the goal of improving the timeliness of the dispositions and thereby minimizing the harm to children affected by these sensitive family proceedings. The supreme court established the performance monitoring process, adopting eight timeframes pertinent to these cases (the eight timeframes are Final Judgement to Disposition; Notice of Appeal to Disposition; Notice of Appeal to Record; Record to Initial Brief; Initial Brief to Answer Brief; Answer Brief to Reply Brief; Answer Brief to Conference/Oral Argument; and Conference/Oral Argument to Disposition).

Over several years of monitoring, the district courts have consistently met four of the eight timeframes as well as the overall goal of 165 days from Notice of Appeal to Disposition. However, in four of the timeframes, the commission also identified areas in need of improvement; all four pertain to the receipt of documents (i.e., Notice of Appeal to Record; Record to Initial Brief; Initial Brief to Answer Brief; and Answer Brief to Reply Brief). While improvements have been made in meeting these timeframes, the commission noted challenges with meeting performance goals.

To address this concern, in fall 2014, the supreme court directed the DCAP&A and the TCP&A to establish a joint workgroup to determine the issues and processes that might advance the receipt of these documents and thus alleviate the delays; the workgroup was chaired by Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit. After examining the data, reviewing responses to a court reporting manager survey it drafted, identifying the challenges that need to be addressed, and

reaching out to the various stakeholders (e.g., court reporting managers, district court clerks, trial court clerks), the workgroup prepared a report, *Recommendations for Dependency and Termination of Parental Rights Appeals*, which offers suggestions for reducing the delays in document receipt.

The Commission on DCA Performance and Accountability and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability believe that through concerted effort, the timeframes in dependency and termination of parental rights appeals cases can be improved: indeed, simple efforts on the part of all the stakeholders—including judges, clerks, court reporters, trial court administration, and appellate counsel—have the ability to significantly diminish the delays in these cases.

In its report, the workgroup observes that several rules and court procedures have already been developed to address these delays—but that they may be overlooked in practice. Thus in its recommendations, the workgroup reiterates these rules and procedures and encourages conformity. Other recommendations emphasize the need to provide notice in advance of these appeals. The two commissions believe that through concerted effort, these timeframes can be improved: indeed, simple efforts on the part of all the stakeholders—including judges, clerks, court reporters, trial court administration, and appellate counsel—have the ability to significantly diminish the delays in these cases. In a February 2017 administrative order, the supreme court approved the report and adopted its recommendations. ([Follow this link to read the administrative order.](#))

Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability

While the DCAs have been state-funded for many years, the trial courts have not. Prior to the 2004 implementation of Revision 7 (more precisely, section 14 to Article V of the Florida Constitution), the trial courts were primarily county-funded, which caused disparities in the level of court services provided across the state. Revision 7 sought to alleviate these disparities, ensuring equitable distribution of resources to each circuit through the use of state funds. Since the successful implementation of Revision 7, the TCP&A has largely focused its efforts on establishing new, state-level performance and accountability policies for the trial courts, with an end result of better, more uniform services across all circuits.

Among the TCP&A's many projects are four major technology initiatives: the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System, the Trial Court Performance Management Framework, the Uniform Case Reporting Project, and Shared Remote Interpreting. Readers interested in learning about these projects can read about them in the Court Technology section of this annual report.

Due Process Workgroup

Due process signifies the administration of justice in accordance with established rules and principles, laid down to ensure that all people receive equal treatment under the law. In Florida's courts system, *due process elements* refers to the resources that directly protect the fundamental constitutional and legal rights of court litigants. Those resources are court reporting (the process that creates and preserves a record of words spoken in court, and when necessary, provides their timely and accurate transcription in the event that an appeal is filed); court interpreting (court interpreting eliminates barriers in the court system for litigants with disabilities or limited ability to communicate in English); and expert witnesses (expert witnesses provide independent expert opinions concerning scientific or technical matters in dispute, or the physical, psychological or mental condition of persons in court matters involving fundamental rights).



Judge Diane Moreland, Twelfth Circuit, chairs the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability.

In spring 2015, the Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC), which oversees the preparation and implementation of the trial court component of the judicial branch budget, identified some concerning trends relating to the due process budgets of the trial courts: in particular, some circuits were experiencing increased expenditures. Commission members determined that a thorough study of the provision of due process services was needed in order to better position

*The report **Expert Witnesses in Florida's Trial Courts**, prepared by a joint workgroup of the Trial Court Budget Commission and the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability, presents fiscal, operational, policy, and statutory recommendations, including recommendations that require circuits to adopt written policies to govern the appointment and payment of expert witnesses; select experts from a registry maintained by the circuit; establish a statewide rate structure for certain types of evaluations; appoint one expert initially in standard adult competency proceedings; and implement an educational component for judges and court staff.*

the TCBC to make decisions on due process legislative budget requests, the allocation of funds among the circuits, and management of the statewide reserve. Because the provision of these services involves policy as well as fiscal considerations, and because the TCP&A has worked extensively to develop best practices and standards for due process services, the TCBC chair at the time, Chief Judge Mark Mahon, Fourth Circuit, invited the TCP&A to participate in a joint workgroup to identify factors affecting the cost of providing due process services and to develop fiscal and operational recommendations for the provision of these services.

Established in June 2015 and chaired jointly by a TCBC member, Judge John Stargel, Tenth Circuit, and the TCP&A chair, Judge Moreland, the Due Process Workgroup was directed to address expert witnesses, court interpreting, and court reporting—and was asked to focus on expert witness issues first.

The workgroup's report, *Expert Witnesses in Florida's Trial Courts*, presents fiscal, operational, policy, and statutory recommendations. The supreme court approved the report in February 2017, including recommendations that require circuits to adopt written policies to govern the appointment and payment of expert witnesses; select experts from a registry maintained by the circuit; establish a statewide rate structure for certain types of evaluations; appoint one expert initially in standard adult competency proceedings; and implement an educational component for judges and court staff. ([This link goes to the administrative order adopting the workgroup's recommendations.](#)) The Due Process Workgroup has now turned its attention to court interpreting and aims to issue recommendations regarding this due process element later this year.

Judicial Workload Study

Since 1999, the court has relied on the weighted caseload method to determine the need for judges in each circuit and county court during the annual judicial certification process. ([This link goes to information about that process.](#)) For the 1999 workload assessment, OSCA, with the help of the National Center for State Courts, measured judicial workload using a time study, for which nearly 120 judges tracked their time spent on different types of cases.

Case weights need to be reassessed periodically, however: new legislative mandates, changes in court rules, new court initiatives, advances in technology, evolving case precedent, growing case complexity, and the availability (or dearth) of supporting resources all can influence case weights, so the weights must be reassessed regularly to ensure their validity. In 2006 – 07, the case weights were revisited, though a time study was not performed for that update.

In order to re-align case weights with current actualities, in 2014 – 15, the TCP&A initiated efforts to update the case weights used to evaluate judicial workload in the county and circuit courts. Performed under the leadership of the Judicial Needs Assessment Committee, chaired by Judge Paul Alessandrone, Charlotte County, and staffed by OSCA and the National Center for State Courts, the workload assessment was conducted in two phases. First was a new time study

for which participation was sought from all circuit and county judges as well as from all senior judges and quasi-judicial officers (magistrates, child support hearing officers, and civil traffic infraction hearing officers). This time study recorded all case-related and non-case-related work over a four-week period, tracking the time, broken down into small increments, spent on 27 case types. Altogether, 97 percent of circuit and county judges and 96 percent of quasi-judicial officers participated in the time study, which has provided an empirical description of the amount of time judges and judicial officers currently devote to processing each case type, as well as the division of the workday between case-related and non-case-related activities.



The second phase was a quality adjustment process to ensure that the final weighted caseload models incorporate sufficient time for efficient and effective case processing. This process included a statewide *sufficiency of time survey*, site visits to circuit and county courts in eight circuits, and a structured quality review of the case weights by groups of experienced judges from across the state.

The *Florida Judicial Workload Assessment: Final Report*, drafted by National Center for State Courts staff, makes six recommendations, which the supreme court adopted. Currently, implementation options are being evaluated for three of them: the legislature should consider creating new judgeships in the circuit and county courts where the weighted caseload model shows a need for additional judicial resources; given the impact of support personnel, OSCA should conduct workload assessments for trial court law clerks and staff attorneys; and, given the important contribution made by quasi-judicial officers, OSCA should conduct a comprehensive investigation into the various roles and uses of quasi-judicial officers across the state. [\(This link goes to the final report.\)](#)

Fairness and Diversity Awareness

In the judicial branch’s long-range plan, the very first goal articulated is to “Perform judicial duties and administer justice without bias or prejudice.” This commitment to fairness is also expressed in the branch’s vision statement, which clarifies that, “To be fair, the Florida justice system will respect the dignity of every person, regardless of race, class, gender or other characteristic, apply the law appropriately to the circumstances of individual cases, and include judges and court staff who reflect the community’s diversity.” With the help of several supreme court-appointed committees over the last 30 years, the judicial branch has striven to realize these objectives, working heedfully to establish court settings that are free of preconceptions and to create environments in which judges, court personnel, attorneys, and litigants treat each other with courtesy, dignity, and consideration. For information about the history of fairness and



In January 2017, after giving a presentation at the Shepard Broad College of Law (Nova Southeastern University) on *Implicit Bias, Explicit Justice: Fairness and Diversity Insights from the Bench*, several members of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity pose for a photo with attendees.

diversity initiatives in Florida's courts system, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 14).

The body currently spearheading the court system's fairness initiatives is the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity, which was established in 2004 to "advance the State Courts System's efforts to eliminate from court operations bias that is based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, financial status, or any characteristic that is without legal relevance." Chaired by Judge Scott Bernstein, Eleventh Circuit, the committee had a highly productive fiscal year. ([This link goes to the administrative order governing the committee's 2014 – 16 term.](#))

One of the committee's most ambitious tasks was to develop an educational campaign on implicit bias, and it addressed this project on several fronts. For instance, it utilized a National Center of State Courts grant to fund a half-day presentation on the Science of Decision Making, which has come to play an important role in developing training for judges (the presentation led to the formulation of a standardized curriculum and a toolbox to provide judges with the necessary foundations for devising and implementing their own fairness and diversity policies and procedures). The committee also developed a two-day Diversity Trainer Course, at which 12 court staff from around the state received training on how to deliver and/or facilitate diversity training in their own circuits. Moreover, the committee created a diversity repository for judges and court staff that comprises resources on diversity, implicit bias, and related materials.



Attendees of the Tenth Circuit's June 2016 Diversity and Fairness Summit participate in a Privilege Walk Activity, which is designed to encourage people "to recognize how power and privilege can affect our lives even when we are not aware it is happening."

([Take this link to visit the repository.](#)) The committee also reconstituted the trial and appellate court diversity teams; established in 2006, the 26 diversity teams support committee efforts to coordinate local training programs for judges and court staff and to develop and promote diversity awareness initiatives at the local level. Finally, committee members traveled around Florida to offer diversity trainings, participate in diversity events, and give talks about how to build awareness of implicit bias. For example, committee members conducted fairness and diversity education programs for judges at the Seventh and Eleventh Circuits; presented at a fairness and diversity summit for court personnel at the Tenth Circuit; attended several Minority Mentoring Picnics; and gave diversity presentations at two law schools (Stetson and Nova Southeastern).

The committee also developed a best practices guide to provide useful advice and direction to Florida judges and court staff on the implementation of court diversity strategies and initiatives. The *Diversity Best Practices Guide*, described as "a positive and practical tool that can be used for recognizing and eliminating biased behaviors from court operations," is organized around four topic areas: Leadership, Education, Access to Courts, and Public Perception. It is available on the [Fairness and Diversity page of the flcourts website](#), and print versions have been distributed to every circuit. ([This link goes to the Best Practices Guide.](#))

Furthermore, building on outreach efforts undertaken during its prior two-year term, the committee continued to collaborate with The Florida Bar, local bar associations, community organizations, Florida law schools, and other partners to advance fairness and diversity initiatives in the Florida justice system. Outreach endeavors include serving on various local, statewide, and national boards and associations, for instance, as well as building partnerships with state law schools, local bar chapters, and mentoring foundations.

And, finally, the committee explored funding opportunities for fairness and diversity education programs, identifying the Florida Court Education Council and The Florida Bar's Diversity and Inclusion Committee as promising funding entities.

Judge Bernstein chaired the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity from 2008 – 2016; as of July 1, 2016, the committee is being chaired by Judge Peter F. Estrada, Tenth Circuit, with Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit, serving as vice chair. ([Take this link to access the administrative order governing the committee's 2016 – 18 term.](#))

Long-Range Issue #2: Enhance Access to Justice and Court Services

Florida's courts are committed to equal access to justice for all. However, litigation costs, communication barriers, lack of information, complexity, biases, and physical obstructions can create difficulties for those seeking to access the courts to obtain relief. The judicial branch must strive to identify and remove real or perceived barriers to better provide meaningful access to the courts.

The judicial branch recognizes that a cornerstone of the justice system is public access to the courts. As Article I, section 21 of the Constitution of the State of Florida states, "The courts shall be open to every person for redress of any injury, and justice shall be administered without sale, denial, or delay." At the same time, the branch acknowledges that, in seeking access to the courts, litigants may face obstacles: economic barriers, cultural and attitudinal impediments, language and communication obstructions, or physical or electronic hurdles.

The judicial branch is actively committed to identifying and reducing these obstacles. Through its endeavors to improve access to civil justice, to expand the pool of certified court interpreters, and to facilitate architectural and electronic access for people with disabilities, and through its efforts to promote the use of innovative and effective problem-solving courts and alternative dispute resolution processes, the judicial branch aspires to ensure that everyone who enters the courts, whether literally or virtually, has meaningful access to justice and court services.

Access to Civil Justice

In November 2014, citing the challenges faced by disadvantaged, low-income, and moderate-income Floridians when seeking meaningful and informed access to the civil justice system, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga signed an administrative order establishing the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice. ([This link goes to the administrative order creating the commission.](#))

Bringing together the three branches of government, The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Foundation, civil legal aid providers, the business community, and other well-known stakeholders, the commission has embarked upon a coordinated effort to identify and remove economic and other barriers to civil justice.

Since its inception, the commission has proposed the development of a statewide online triage gateway portal (the Florida Legal Access Gateway) that will recommend



Florida Chief Justice Jorge Labarga speaks to reporters before the February 2017 meeting of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.

the best existing civil legal resources for users based on variables such as type of case, user's location, user's preference, and other factors (currently being piloted in Clay County); the use of retired judges and retired and active law professors to serve as emeritus attorneys; the designation to legal aid programs of any unallocated, unclaimed, or undeliverable funds left over from a class action settlement or judgement; and the development of web-based, interactive interviews to help self-represented litigants assemble pleadings and other documents suitable for filing. For background about the commission and more information about these projects, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 11).

Initially, the commission was set to expire on June 30, 2016, but its final report recommended that an access to justice commission be reappointed on a continuing basis as a means to enhance its effectiveness in addressing the long-term and complex barriers that create difficulties for those Floridians seeking meaningful access to civil justice. The supreme court concurred, and in October 2016, it established a standing commission on access to justice; the chief justice continues to serve as chair. The administrative order re-establishing the commission directs it to consider "Florida's legal assistance delivery system as a whole, including but not limited to staffed legal aid programs, resources and support for self-represented litigants, limited scope representation, pro bono services, innovative technology solutions, and other models and potential innovations." ([This link goes to the administrative order governing the standing commission.](#))

"Our judicial system is founded on the fundamental principle that justice should be accessible to all people, regardless of income or status. But for some people, even people with moderate incomes who are making a good life for themselves and their families, this truly grand principle ends up being nothing more than an empty theory. Why? Because they don't have the money to hire an attorney. They make too much to qualify for legal aid—or they qualify for legal aid, but legal aid has hit its limit and can take no more clients." The commission was created to "build a bridge to close the access gap." ~Chief Justice Jorge Labarga



To carry out this work, the order established three committees within the commission. The Executive Committee, which comprises the chairs of the commission committees, the business partner liaison, and the chief justice, is tasked with establishing a Council of Business Partners to cultivate a collaborative relationship between the corporate community and the civil legal services committee; overseeing the development of a long-range plan for the commission; and examining the proposals recommended by commission committees. The Services Options Committee will evaluate the existing civil legal services delivery system to identify opportunities for enhancing coordination and employing business efficiencies; recommend proven components of a continuum of services that includes resources for self-represented litigants; and collaborate with other entities to identify barriers to access. And the Resource Evaluation Committee is directed to inventory existing federal, state, and private funding opportunities that might support components of a continuum of services affording access to the Florida civil justice system; research the effects of the unmet civil justice needs on Florida's

business and economy; and review or develop funding plans for projects supported by the commission. On June 30 of even-numbered years, the commission will submit reports on its progress to the supreme court. ([Take this link to the website of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.](#))

At a press meeting before the commission's first meeting of 2017, Chief Justice Labarga once again threw light on the need for a standing commission on access to civil justice: "Our judicial system is founded on the fundamental principle that justice should be accessible to all people, regardless of income or status. But for some people, even people with moderate incomes who are making a good life for themselves and their families, this truly grand principle ends up being

nothing more than an empty theory. Why? Because they don't have the money to hire an attorney. They make too much to qualify for legal aid—or they qualify for legal aid, but legal aid has hit its limit and can take no more clients.” The commission was created to “build a bridge to close the access gap.” He then reminded listeners that “It will take ALL of us working together to make the truly grand principle of equal access to justice a concrete reality rather than an empty theory.”

Court Interpreting Services

The US Census Bureau reports that of the approximately 20.6 million people currently calling Florida home, roughly 20.2 percent are foreign born. Moreover, in the region of 12 percent of Florida's residents have limited English proficiency. Recognizing that language hurdles can limit access to the courts and court services, the long-range plan emphasizes the need to “Reduce communication and language barriers to facilitate participation in court proceedings” (goal 5 of Long-Range Issue #2). To minimize the effect of language hindrances, the supreme court's Court Interpreter Certification Board, currently chaired by Judge Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit, has continued its efforts to establish a pool of well-qualified court interpreters (whose role is to place people with limited English proficiency on equal footing with those who speak English) and to provide judges and trial court administrators with the means to evaluate the credentials of spoken language interpreters seeking appointment. To learn about the history of branch endeavors to develop a robust court interpreting program, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 15).

The Court Interpreter Rules establish three official state-level designations for spoken language interpreters: 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 (at a lesser qualifying prescribed level) and satisfied the other general prerequisites but is not yet certified in a spoken language for which a state-certifying exam is available. Currently, Florida's courts system has 321 certified interpreters, two language skilled interpreters, and 44 provisionally approved interpreters. Depending on the location of the court interpreter user, qualified interpreting services are now available in the following languages: Arabic, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, French, German, Haitian Creole, Hungarian, Jamaican Patois, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian. (Note: Arabic, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, German, Hungarian, Jamaican Patois, and Romanian are all new to the statewide roster of spoken language court interpreters.) And as virtual remote interpreting technology becomes available in more state courts, resource-sharing will become more prevalent, which will enable the branch to significantly improve interpreter services while using state resources wisely. (To learn about shared remote interpreting in Florida's courts, please see the article below on Court Technology).

To become a court interpreter, applicants are required to fulfill a series of rigorous requirements, the first of which is to participate in a two-day orientation program administered by OSCA or a training provider approved by the Court Interpreter Certification Board (the orientation workshop must be taken before one can sit for the written and oral performance examinations). Conducted in English and open to all foreign language and sign language interpreters, these highly interactive workshops immerse attendees in a comprehensive introduction to the courts and the justice environment and give them an opportunity to build and practice their interpreting skills. OSCA facilitates at least three orientation programs each year, in diverse locations in Florida, and they are always well-attended. Between July 2015 and February 2017, nine workshops were offered (in Tampa, Tallahassee, Fort Lauderdale, and Orlando), and 611



In April 2016, the Tenth Circuit hosted a day-long continuing court interpreter education program, in which 91 court interpreters from across the southern part of the state participated; here, the chair of the Court Interpreter Certification Board, Judge J. Kevin Abdoney, Tenth Circuit, welcomes attendees to the program.

prospective court interpreters attended; in the same time period, 270 candidates took the written exam, and 237 took the oral performance exam. To bolster attendance at the orientation programs, some circuits have taken an active role in encouraging people to become court interpreters: the Seventh, Ninth, and Nineteenth Circuits, for instance, have developed local recruitment sessions, aiming to build a pool of potential court interpreters in advance of the statewide orientation workshops.

Currently, Florida's courts system has 321 certified interpreters, two language skilled interpreters, and 44 provisionally approved interpreters. Depending on the location of the court interpreter user, qualified interpreting services are now available in the following languages: Arabic, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, French, German, Haitian Creole, Hungarian, Jamaican Patois, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian. And as virtual remote interpreting technology becomes available in more state courts, resource-sharing will become more prevalent, which will enable the branch to significantly improve interpreter services while using state resources wisely.

Florida's court interpreters are also required to earn a minimum of 16 continuing interpreter education credits every two years—a requirement since 2010. So far, the Court Interpreter Certification Board has approved 149 court interpreter education programs. While most of the programs have been offered by private entities, a number of circuits have begun to develop free, face-to-face training opportunities for their own interpreters and those in nearby circuits. Thus far, nine circuits have received approval for locally-devised programs: the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Tenth, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Circuits. All told, they have offered 29 education programs—on a wide variety of topics. In 2015 – 16, six circuits—the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, Tenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Circuits—offered continuing interpreter education programs, treating court interpreters to a veritable windfall of cost-free, home-grown training opportunities. [\(To learn more about Florida's court interpreting program, please follow this link.\)](#)



The job of a court interpreter is to place a non-English speaker on an equal footing with those who understand English. Here, that point is being made by Melinda Gonzalez-Hibner, a Spanish language court interpreter, to 58 prospective court interpreters participating in an intensive two-day orientation workshop in Tallahassee in October 2016. These orientation programs provide a comprehensive introduction to the courts as well as opportunities for participants to practice and improve their skills and discuss shared challenges with fellow interpreters.

Court Access for People with Disabilities

Enacted in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was established to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities that are available to those without disabilities. The ADA protects individuals who have impairments that substantially limit major life activities (e.g., breathing, seeing, hearing, speaking, understanding, learning, walking, caring for themselves, performing manual tasks, working).



At the October 2016 statewide education program for the courts' ADA coordinators, Trial Court Administrator Nick Sudzina, Tenth Circuit, facilitated a panel presentation called What the ADA Means to Me; panelists are (l – r) Chris Littlewood, an instructional technology coordinator with the Center for Public Safety Innovation at St. Petersburg College; Barb Page, a senior advocate investigator with Disability Rights Florida; and Craig Spencer, an attorney for Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida.

The most recent census data reveal that nearly one in five people in the US report having one or more disabilities. And because the risk of having impairments grows with age, that number is likely to be even higher in Florida, the state with the highest rate of residents 65 years or older. To provide meaningful access to Florida's courts for all people, the judicial branch continues its efforts to ensure that individuals with disabilities can effectively participate in court proceedings, programs, and services. To learn more about the branch's longstanding commitment to compliance with the ADA, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 17).

Since 1990, each of Florida's 20 circuits and five DCAs has had at least one ADA coordinator to facilitate compliance with the ADA at the local level. ADA coordinators have a wide range of responsibilities: in addition to being informed about new ADA regulations and their implications, they are expected to be conversant with ADA issues associated with facility accessibility, purchasing, contracts, technology, and electronic accessibility, for instance.

The branch has also had a statewide ADA coordinator who provides technical assistance to judicial officers and court employees regarding court compliance with the ADA. The statewide coordinator since 1994, Ms Debbie Howells also works to ensure that the local coordinators are familiar with the resources available to them, are informed about advances in auxiliary aids and services, have opportunities to share with one another solutions for challenging situations, and are apprised of promising educational events and programs.

In addition, Ms Howells periodically coordinates a statewide education program for the local ADA coordinators. At the most recent, held in October 2016 and funded by the Florida Court Education Council, more than 40 coordinators participated, representing most of the circuits and DCAs. The curriculum of this day-and-a-half-long program included two sessions on Title I (the first, on Engaging with Judicial Officers and Court Employees to Successfully Determine

Reasonable Accommodations, and the second, a roundtable on What Would You Do?); two sessions on Title II (the first, on Avoiding Common Mistakes, and the second, a roundtable on What Would You Do?); the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's New Enforcement Guidelines on Retaliation and Related Issues; What Court ADA Coordinators Should Know about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; and a presentation by a panel of professionals with disabilities who shared their experiences about What the ADA Means to Me. Finally, in a particularly memorable session called Service Animals: Ensuring a Paws-itive Experience for Court Participants Who Rely on Assistance from Individually Trained Service Animals, founder Carol Christopherson and other representatives of Florida Service Dogs, Inc., provided a lively and meaningful demonstration of the amazing tasks that can be performed by a service animal on behalf of individuals with a variety of disabilities, while cleverly weaving in a wealth of information about state and federal laws and regulations that govern the use of service animals.

Ms Howells also offered a training on Disability Awareness for 40 court employees at the 2017 Florida Court Personnel Institute; attendees learned practical techniques for interacting with people who have disabilities; were introduced to reasonable accommodations, policy modifications, and auxiliary aids and services; and were offered tips for locating resources for responding to ADA situations that arise in the court environment. The following day, Ms Howells conducted a two-hour training at the Orange County Courthouse for Ninth Circuit managers and supervisors on the ADA: What Every Court Manager Should Know; the goal was to prepare attendees for court-related ADA situations with a focus on practical application rather than details of law.

The branch introduces many statewide efforts to identify and remove obstacles that people with disabilities might face in seeking access to the courts. But access initiatives are also regularly spearheaded at the local level, and, each year, the annual report calls attention to one circuit's or DCA's efforts to improve courthouse accessibility. For the 2015 – 16 FY, the spotlight is on the Tenth Circuit, which renovated two of its courtrooms to make them accessible. For this project, the witness stands and jury boxes were lowered (and a wall was removed) to make them accessible to people who use wheelchairs, and the jurors' restrooms were redesigned for accessibility. In addition, each courtroom now has an accessible bench and clerk's workspace: accessible paths (ramps) to the benches were installed; accessible desks were furnished; and space was cleared out to create unobstructed turning spaces for wheelchairs and scooters. [\(For more information about efforts to ensure the accessibility of court services, programs, and activities, please take this link.\)](#)



One of the especially memorable sessions at the statewide ADA coordinators conference was called Service Animals: Ensuring a Paws-itive Experience for Court Participants Who Rely on Assistance from Individually Trained Service Animals. Holding the dog is Florida Service Dogs founder Carol Christopherson, whose presentation introduced attendees to some of the remarkable tasks that service animals can perform for people with disabilities.

Family Court

Some of life's most complex, painful, and private family matters end up being adjudicated in the courts. Since launching its first family court initiative in 1991, the judicial branch has been working with community, state, and federal partners to develop comprehensive, integrated approaches to handling these sensitive matters. Many of the branch's innovative family court programs, projects, and practices are pioneered by the supreme court's Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court (FCC). Since the committee's first iteration, which was established in 1994, this body of judges, quasi-judicial officers, and justice system partners has provided guidance and support to courts around the state, helping to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of family court operations. In the 2014 – 16 term, the FCC was chaired by Justice Barbara J. Pariente. [\(Take this link to read the administrative order that shaped the direction of the FCC during this time period.\)](#) Also lending assistance in advancing the branch's family court goals is OSCA's Office of Court Improvement (OCI); in addition to staffing the steering committee, the OCI develops and coordinates a wide range of family court trainings, publications, and other projects. Through implementing the innovative practices and programs developed by the FCC and the OCI, the judicial branch works to resolve family-related disputes in a fair, timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner. For more information about the history of family court initiatives, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 18).



Members of the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court pose for a group photo after their February 2017 meeting.

The One Family, One Judge Model

To evaluate the statewide progress in implementing a One Family, One Judge model, the FCC utilized two surveys to gather information from the circuits to better understand circuit practices, processes, and barriers for handling all related family cases with a single judge. After reviewing the survey results, FCC members concluded that, with training and technical assistance, many of the challenges that the circuits are facing can be overcome (the two most significant barriers are the difficulty in identifying related family cases and geographical/logistical challenges). In September 2015 and again in September 2016, the FCC coordinated a half-day, statewide family court workshop to share best practices and develop action plans with the goal of full implementation of the One Family, One Judge model; steering committee members then monitored each circuit's action plans and participated in several site visits to assist with implementation issues. The FCC is planning a full day workshop for September 2017.

School-Justice Partnerships

Developed by the FCC several years ago, the *School-Justice Partnership Tool Kit* is a how-to guide for implementing and maintaining partnerships among courts, school districts, state agencies, service providers, and law enforcement. This online guide was developed in response to the FCC's commitment to ensuring that children involved in family court cases

stay in school and are not subject to suspension, expulsion, or arrests at higher rates than their peers. During the 2015 – 16 FY, the steering committee encouraged courts to work with local school boards to implement the collaborative practices advanced in the tool kit; the FCC also expanded the scope of the tool kit to include children involved in additional family court case types, and it enhanced the website's usability as a one-stop repository of technical assistance materials and data for active school-justice partnership sites.

The FCC also coordinated a kickoff event in November 2015 that was attended by eight county teams (four mentor sites and four pilot sites). Each site brought at least ten stakeholders to the training, and, altogether, 119 people participated, including judges, magistrates, state attorneys, public defenders, juvenile justice staff, school officials, community-based care providers, and law enforcement. The two-day event included sessions on the what, why, who, and how of school-justice partnerships; the importance of trauma-informed practice; strategies for maximizing federal funding; and four “what works for us” sessions, conducted by the lead judges of the school-justice partnership teams from Alachua, Broward, Palm Beach, and Pinellas counties. Since the kickoff, with the support of the FCC and the OCI, each site has been working to develop action step items. Currently, three more sites have expressed interest in pursuing school-justice partnerships, and additional jurisdictions are being encouraged to join the effort. ([This link goes to the School-Justice Partnership Tool Kit.](#))

Family Court Took Kit on Trauma and Child Development

The *Family Court Tool Kit on Trauma and Child Development*, released by the FCC in 2015, provides promising practices for moving toward a trauma-responsive family court that is informed about childhood development and the architecture of the developing brain. It contains critical, front-line, science-based information that can aid in determining children's needs based on developmental milestones and the impact of trauma. The tool kit discusses the current problem, the solution, the goal, and 10 practical actions that judges, magistrates, and court staff can take to ensure a trauma-responsive court; it also features benchguides, red flags, and common traumatic stress reactions for each age group. Since the release of the tool kit, the FCC has implemented a promotion action plan; the steering committee has been advertising it at various statewide conferences and judicial education events and developed a training curriculum that can easily be delivered in multidisciplinary group settings. ([This link goes to the Tool Kit on Trauma and Child Development.](#))

Dependency Court Improvement Panel

Another responsibility of the steering committee is to assist the branch's statewide, multidisciplinary Dependency Court Improvement Panel, established in 2009 by then Chief Justice Peggy A. Quince to improve courtroom practices and decision-making in dependency cases. The Dependency Panel, currently chaired by Judge Hope Bristol, Seventeenth Circuit, focused on two major projects during the 2015 – 16 FY: Early Childhood Courts and the development of permanency dockets.

Dependency judges recognize that a child's future social-emotional health, school-readiness, and life-long well-being are dependent upon healthy attachment and early brain development from birth to age three. They also understand that infants and toddlers in the child welfare system face an especially high risk for developmental delays, non-optimal attachment relationships, trauma, and toxic stress that can affect their adjustment and well-being for years to come—often, for a lifetime. To address this issue, many courts across Florida have established an Early Childhood Court, which is a specialized problem-solving docket that focuses on cases involving children ages zero to three who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected. In each of



Justice Barbara J. Pariente welcomes attendees to the Florida School-Justice Partnerships kickoff event in November 2015.



Judge Hope T. Bristol, who serves in the dependency division of the Seventeenth Circuit, chairs the statewide Dependency Court Improvement Panel. When children come to the courthouse, she makes every effort to help them feel as comfortable as possible.

these dockets, members of an Early Childhood Court Team (comprising judges, case workers, attorneys, infant mental health clinicians, and parent and community organizations) work together to identify and expand evidence-based services for, and to prevent the further traumatization of, young children. The goals of Early Childhood Court are to improve child safety and well-being; heal trauma and repair the parent-child relationship; expedite permanency; and stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse/neglect/violence.



At a Juvenile Dependency Workload Tracking Workshop at the supreme court in October 2016, judges and court personnel worked to identify events within juvenile dependency cases that involve significant judicial workload or court resources that are not captured by current tracking and reporting data systems; participants also considered appropriate data management and reporting processes for capturing this workload and resource usage.

To advance these efforts, the Dependency Panel, with the support of the OCI, spearheaded the Early Childhood Court Initiative in 2015. Financed with a grant from Zero to Three: Quality Improvement Center for Research-Based Infant-Toddler Court Teams, the Early Childhood Court Initiative provides the state’s Early Childhood Courts with training, technical assistance, judicial coaching with national judicial experts, support for sustainability, and enhancement of data collection and data analysis. Currently, the Early Childhood Court Initiative is established in 18 sites across the state.

In addition, in 2016, Florida was one of four states selected to participate in a national project called Reimagining Dependency Courts. With support from the National Center for State Courts and Casey Family Programs (a national foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care), the Dependency Panel and the OCI conceptualized the piloting of a permanency docket, a new dependency problem-solving court model. The pilot program, which will be conducted in Broward County and Palm Beach County, was developed by multidisciplinary teams from each county and will focus on “long stayers in care” (children who have been in out-of-home care for 18 months or longer). The teams have already identified the populations on which to focus and drafted core components based on other problem-solving court models; both jurisdictions will introduce their permanency dockets in 2017.



For the 2016 – 18 term, the FCC is governed by a new administrative order. Now chaired by Judge Christine Greider, Twentieth Circuit, the FCC will continue monitoring and refining One Family, One Judge practices, expanding the number of school-justice partnerships, and assisting the Dependency Court Improvement Panel. In addition, the steering committee has been directed to consider the handling of criminal domestic violence cases in Florida’s judicial circuits and to develop recommendations for model practices to help ensure the safety of the victims, eliminate conflicting orders between court divisions, and provide clear statewide standards. [\(This link goes to the new administrative order.\)](#)

Interpersonal Violence Resources

The judicial branch also develops education and training resources aimed at enhancing its response to issues related to interpersonal violence, which includes domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, repeat violence, and stalking.

Since 2004, the OCI has been receiving STOP Violence Against Women Grants, which support branch efforts to improve the handling of domestic violence cases (intimate violence injunctions, partner rape). When the STOP Grant formula recently expanded the reach of the domestic violence umbrella to include sexual violence, the OCI extended its scope as well, and in the 2015 – 16 FY, the office additionally began to develop resources to support judges and court personnel who address matters relating to adult criminal sexual violence cases (acquaintance and stranger rape).

To prepare for this expanded focus, OCI staff conducted court observations and surveyed stakeholders statewide to elicit information that can be used to map the future of an OCI STOP Grant Sexual Violence Initiative (a specialized survey was designed for each kind of stakeholder: stakeholders included survivors, victim advocates, rape crisis center advocates, prosecutors, judges, court staff, clerks, bailiffs, law enforcement); altogether, 530 responses were received. In addition, the OCI established a Sexual Violence Advisory Group that is now working to identify and prioritize the issues that the initiative should address (the OCI has long been guided by a Domestic Violence Advisory Group, established in 2013, to share the wisdom and experience of experts in different domestic violence capacities across the state; the Sexual Violence Advisory Group was conceived to function similarly). Among the OCI's first projects is a *Sexual Violence Benchbook*, which should be available by June 30, 2017. The office also introduced a new, biannual newsletter called the *Sexual Violence Review*, which serves as an introduction to the sexual violence arena for those who are new to this case type. In addition, the OCI offered two webinars devoted to current sexual violence issues: the first was on Sexual Assault Response Teams, and the second was a sexual violence legislative update. Finally, the office is facilitating a judicial training event for spring 2017 for judges who are already hearing, or who soon will be hearing, sexual violence cases; three webinars, courtesy of the National Judicial Education Program, will provide attendees with a foundational level of sexual violence procedural training, and topics will include *What I Wish I Had Known Before I Presided in an Adult Victim Sexual Assault Case*; *Intimate Partner Sexual Abuse*; and *Medical Forensic Sexual Assault Examinations*.



In addition to this new focus on sexual violence, the OCI continues to develop education and training resources for those handling domestic violence cases. To support statewide consistency and uniformity in the handling of domestic violence cases, it established the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence in 2014, which began offering a Regional Training Program soon thereafter. Conducted by Judge Carroll Kelly, Miami-Dade, and Judge Peter Ramsberger, Sixth Circuit, this training has been held in nine cities across Florida so far; indeed, every area of the state has now hosted one. In 2017, the institute began offering phase II of the training; while phase I worked to ensure that judges across the state are on the same page with regard to domestic violence injunctions, the second phase—which will be offered twice in 2017—considers rarer matters that occasionally arise during domestic violence injunctions (e.g., weapons issues, immigration issues). All told, 171 judges have attended phase one of the training, at an average cost of just over \$306 per participant (before these trainings were introduced, judges who sought judicial education on domestic violence had to attend national trainings, which cost, on average, \$1,065 per participant).

The OCI also continues to offer two webinars on domestic violence each year (in the 2015 – 16 FY, webinars focused on Seeing Individuals Through a Trauma Lens and on Child Support Guidelines; in 2016 – 17, webinar topics were Domestic Violence and the US Military and Judicial Wellness for Florida Judges and Court Staff: Tools for Self-Care in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Cases). The OCI also facilitated a training on strangulation for domestic violence coordinators across the state.

In addition, the Office of Court Improvement continues to expand its repertoire of domestic violence-related publications. Each year, it produces two issues of the *Domestic Violence Review* and is currently working on a brochure explaining the five different kinds of civil injunctions in Florida: in clarifying the differences among domestic violence, repeat violence, sexual violence, dating violence, and stalking injunctions, this brochure is designed to help petitioners who are representing themselves determine which forms they should file. The OCI is also in the process of updating the *Domestic Violence Benchbook*, and it continues to build the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence website, aiming to make it the chief “go-to” place for judges and stakeholders seeking resources. ([Take this link to access the resources developed by the Florida Institute on Interpersonal Violence.](#))

Problem-Solving Courts and Initiatives

Problem-solving courts are designed to help individuals who have underlying treatment and other needs that are not being addressed, or cannot adequately be addressed, in traditional dockets. The first problem-solving court was established in 1989, when Miami-Dade launched the nation's, and the world's, first drug court. Since then, other kinds of problem-solving court dockets have been implemented using a model similar to the drug court model. The more prevalent problem-solving dockets in Florida are drug court, mental health court, veterans court, and early childhood court (the latter is discussed in the Family Court article above).

Problem-solving courts tend to have certain features in common, such as the use of a team-based, non-adversarial approach; a continuum of individualized treatment services; judicial leadership and interaction; and responses to participant compliance (i.e., incentives and sanctions). Currently, in addition to 18 early childhood courts, Florida has 98 drug courts (47 adult felony drug courts; 8 adult misdemeanor drug courts; 22 juvenile drug courts; 17 family dependency drug courts; and 4 DUI drug courts) as well as 27 mental health courts and 31 veterans courts.

Although most problem-solving dockets are relatively new, studies have already shown that the adult drug court concept produces better treatment outcomes and better cost benefits than other criminal justice strategies for offenders who are at high risk and high need. In addition, these specialized court dockets have been shown to have positive personal results for the participants—and for those whose lives they touch. In 2015, for instance, more than 7,300 people were admitted to drug court, and more than 4,200 graduated from this 12- to 18-month program. During the year, 113 parents who participated in drug court were reunited with their children, and 205 children of participants were reunited with their parents. In addition, 112 drug-free babies were born to women who were participating in drug court. [\(This link goes to more detailed 2015 data about drug court.\)](#)

Many of Florida's problem-solving court initiatives have evolved under the guidance of the supreme court's Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts, established in 2010 (the task force represents a merger of the court's Task Force on Treatment-Based Drug Court and the Mental Health Subcommittee of the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court). This task force is charged with addressing the needs and challenges of individuals with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders who become involved in the justice system. Chaired by Judge Steven Leifman, Miami-Dade County, and supported by OSCA's Office of Court Improvement, the task force includes judges and stakeholders, as well as representatives from the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, and the Agency for Health Care Administration. For more background about Florida's drug courts, veterans courts, and mental health courts and initiatives, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 21).



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

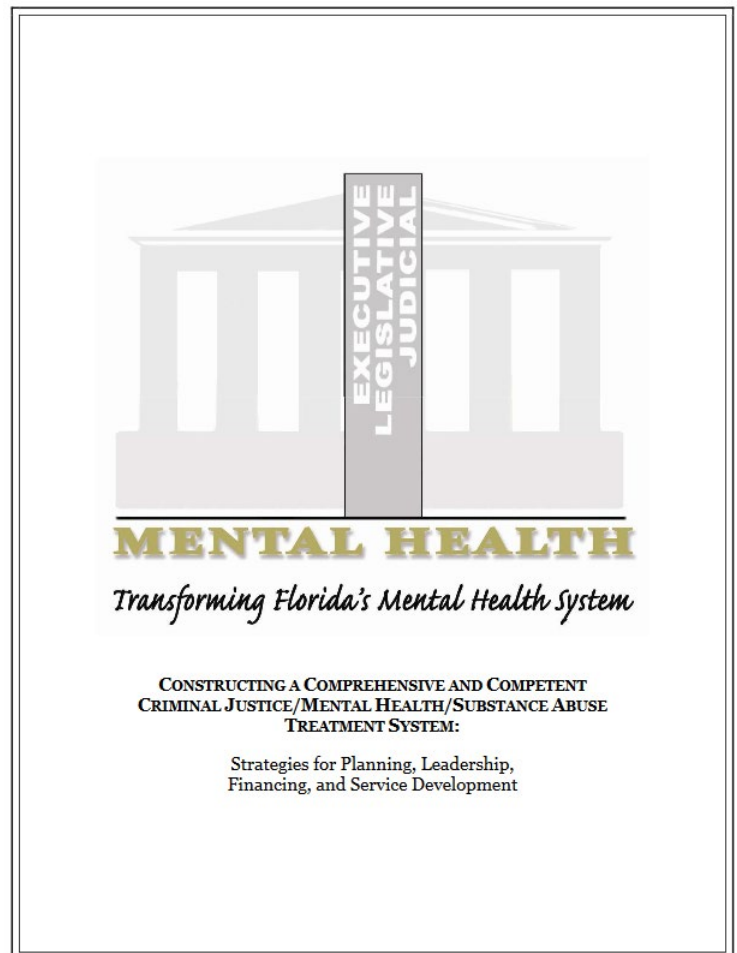
Currently, in addition to 18 early childhood courts, Florida has 98 drug courts (47 adult felony drug courts; 8 adult misdemeanor drug courts; 22 juvenile drug courts; 17 family dependency drug courts; and 4 DUI drug courts) as well as 27 mental health courts and 31 veterans courts.

During its 2014 – 16 term, the Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Courts made significant progress in addressing its three charges. Directed to recommend a strategy for ensuring that drug courts are operating with fidelity to the ten key components (codified by the legislature in 2001), the task force established the Problem-Solving Court Fidelity Workgroup, which recommended that best practices be developed for all drug courts as well

as for mental health and veterans courts. Initially, the workgroup focused on best practice standards for adult drug courts, recommending that they be guided by training and education and that their implementation include a peer review process and a more structured certification process. The task force approved the standards and submitted the workgroup’s proposals to the supreme court for review and approval.

The task force was also enjoined to propose a strategy for participating in a multi-branch effort to update and enhance the Baker Act and the Marchman Act in light of current scientific studies (the Baker Act provides for voluntary or involuntary examination and treatment of people with mental illness; the Marchman Act provides for voluntary or involuntary examination and treatment of people with substance abuse impairment or co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders). The task force created the Baker Act-Marchman Act Workgroup, which, after carefully reviewing prior supreme court committee recommendations to enhance the Baker Act, identified legislative changes that still need to be addressed. It also proposed a blueprint for a multi-branch effort, which was approved by the task force and submitted to, and approved by, the supreme court. Subsequently, the workgroup provided extensive input to legislative staff regarding needed improvements to the two acts, and, ultimately, a bill that included some of the workgroup’s recommendations was passed and signed into law during the 2016 legislative session. The law creates a framework for a coordinated system of care to be provided for people with mental illness or substance use disorders and defines a “no wrong door policy” for accessing care. Although many of the task force recommendations were not included in the bill, the legislature recognizes that reform will be a multi-year effort, and additional legislation has been proposed for the 2017 session.

In addition, the task force was charged with continuing to promote the recommendations of the Mental Health Subcommittee’s 2007 report, *Transforming Florida’s Mental Health System*, which includes a detailed plan for drawing down federal dollars to subsidize a comprehensive system of community-based care services designed to assist people with mental illnesses and keep them from entering the criminal justice system. [\(To view Transforming Florida’s Mental Health System, please follow this link.\)](#) At the request of the legislature, the task force provided guidance on a number of legislative initiatives related to this report. Of particular note is the passage of a bill that authorizes the implementation of a Forensic Hospital Diversion Pilot Program in Duval, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties modeled after the Miami-Dade Forensic Alternative Center, a community-based forensic commitment program. A collaborative effort between the Eleventh Judicial Circuit and the Department of Children and Families, the Miami-Dade Forensic Alternative Center diverts offenders who have mental illnesses or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders from state forensic facilities to more effective and less costly community-based facilities that work to restore competency and successfully reintegrate their patients into the community. [\(To learn more about Florida’s problem-solving courts, please follow this link.\)](#)



The task force continues to promote the recommendations of the Mental Health Subcommittee’s 2007 report, *Transforming Florida’s Mental Health System*.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Initially animated by grassroots, community-driven efforts, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in Florida had its beginnings in Dade County's first citizen dispute settlement center, established in 1975. Thirteen years later, ADR was brought under the umbrella of the Florida courts system. The ADR process that Florida's courts most frequently utilize is mediation, which is a way for people who are having a dispute to talk about their issues and concerns and to make decisions about their dispute with the help of a neutral and impartial guide called a mediator. Litigants who work with a mediator benefit from being able to take an active role in fashioning a solution to their disputes. Moreover, litigants who utilize mediation and other ADR processes generally resolve their cases more quickly and more cost-effectively than those who opt for judicial intervention—thus ADR conserves both the parties' and the courts' time and resources. By supporting branch efforts to process cases effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner, ADR mechanisms play an important role in enhancing access to justice. To learn more about the history of ADR in Florida's courts, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 24).

The statewide hub for ADR education and research is the Florida Dispute Resolution Center (DRC), which was established in 1986 and is housed at the supreme. The DRC also provides staff assistance to five supreme court mediation boards and committees, supports courts across the state in developing ADR programs, and certifies mediators and mediation training programs in five areas: county, family, circuit, dependency, and appellate. In addition, four times a year, DRC staff publish a newsletter, *The Neutral*, which contains ADR news and updates, information about upcoming education programs, and news from the field. [\(This link goes to the current issue of *The Neutral*.\)](#) At the end of February 2017, nearly 5,700 mediators were serving Florida and its citizens. [\(For more information about mediation in Florida, take this link.\)](#)

The DRC's preeminent education event is an annual, statewide conference for ADR practitioners. Typically, about 1,000 conferees are drawn to these programs, where, over the course of two days, they attend three plenary sessions and five workshop sessions (each offering approximately 12 choices). Here, they have an opportunity to earn their required continuing mediation education credits (in ethics, domestic violence, cultural diversity, family, appellate, and general mediation issues)—as well as occasions to network with other ADR professionals from across Florida. If interested, they can also learn about emerging ADR processes such as parenting coordination, eldercare coordination, collaborative law, and non-binding arbitration.



After conducting a Continuing Mediation Education Training at the Sixth Circuit, Kimberly Kosch, senior court operations consultant with OSCA's Dispute Resolution Center, huddles with mediators for a group photo.

The theme of the 2015 program, the DRC's twenty-third annual conference, was *Treasuring the Past and the Spirit of Change*; peering both forward and behind, this program looked back, contemplating the roots of ADR, and looked ahead, pondering changes that are likely in store for ADR in Florida. The theme of the 2016 conference, *Dimensions of Diversity*, focused on some of the many forms of diversity of which mediators must be cognizant—among them, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and culture. Justice Peggy Quince delivered the welcoming comments before both programs, thanking attendees for their support of the judicial branch goal to make justice accessible to all: she stressed that with more than three million cases filed in Florida's state courts each year, and with under 1,000 state judges to handle all these cases, "We could not do what we have to do without the assistance of all of you in this room."

In addition to offering this statewide education program annually, DRC staff conduct free, four-day county mediation training programs, which prepare participants to serve as county court mediators (these are primarily volunteers who mediate small claims cases). DRC staff introduce the prospective mediators to the principles of conflict resolution, the mediation parties and participants, the components of a mediation, cultural and disability awareness, and ethics, among

other topics. On the last day, attendees participate in a role play simulation that is immediately and carefully critiqued by DRC staff and other Florida Supreme Court-certified mediators. In the 2015 – 16 FY, DRC staff conducted two mediation training programs (in Leon and Marion counties), and they offered three additional trainings in late 2016 (in Manatee, Brevard, and Escambia counties); altogether, 74 people participated in these trainings. The DRC will be offering two more trainings in spring 2017 (in Duval and Volusia counties).



Susan Marvin, chief of the Dispute Resolution Center, and Kimberly Kosch, senior court operations consultant, join participants for a photo opportunity at the conclusion of a mediation training program in Ocala.

DRC staff also conducted five Continuing Mediation Education trainings across the state in the 2015 – 16 FY (in Polk, Volusia, Lee, Alachua, and Columbia counties). Designed for volunteer mediators and staff mediators, these free, six-hour trainings—which focus largely on mediator ethics but often address diversity and domestic violence topics as well—help mediators stay up-to-date with their education requirements. Two CME trainings have already been offered in 2017 (in Bay and Broward counties), and three more are scheduled for later in the year (in Flagler, Sarasota, and Lee counties). All told, 180 certified mediators participated in the seven trainings that were held between July 2015 and January 2017.

DRC staff also share their free trainings with some of the state's youngest mediators. Each year, elementary school students studying conflict resolution skills at the Florida State University School (a K-12 charter school in Leon County) commemorate Mediation Week with a visit to the supreme court, where they participate in a variety of education sessions facilitated by DRC staff. In addition to being addressed by a justice (in October 2015, Justice R. Fred Lewis talked to them, and Chief Justice Jorge Labarga made an impromptu appearance as well), the budding mediators learn about the branches of government, the levels of court, and the five mediation certifications. Their visit also includes a

mock mediation staged by DRC staff, after which the children perform several mediation-focused skits before a highly appreciative audience (these skits typically have a fairy tale basis; the Three Little Pigs appears to be a favorite).

Justice Peggy Quince, who delivered the welcoming comments before the annual statewide Dispute Resolution Center Conference, stressed that with more than three million cases filed in Florida's state courts each year, and with under 1,000 state judges to handle all these cases, "We could not do what we have to do without the assistance of all of you in this room."

Also in the 2015 – 16 FY, the supreme court addressed some weighty ADR issues. In October 2016, for instance, it adopted proposed amendments to Part III, Mediation Certification Applications and Discipline, of the Florida Rules for Certified and Court-Appointed Mediators. Part III applies to all proceedings before investigatory committees and adjudicatory panels of the Mediator Qualifications and Discipline Review Board involving applications for certification or discipline of certified and court-appointed mediators. The amendments to the rules were designed to close existing gaps, memorialize and clarify current procedures, and address situations for which no direction previously existed. ([Take this link to the supreme court opinion.](#))



County mediation training program attendees in Brevard County pose for a photo with Susan Marvin, chief of the Dispute Resolution Center, and Kimberly Kosch, senior court operations consultant.

In addition, in a 2016 administrative order, the supreme court established the Parenting Coordinator Disciplinary Review Board to perform investigations and adjudications of grievances against parenting coordinators. (In Florida, parenting coordination was established as a form of dispute resolution by statute in 2013, and in 2014, the supreme court adopted the Rules for Qualified and Court-Appointed Parenting Coordinators, which, among other things, provides that the DRC will implement the disciplinary process for those who violate these rules; the above administrative order was designed to help the DRC fulfill this directive.) In addition to creating the disciplinary review board, the administrative order outlines the board's policies and procedures and identifies its membership composition: three county and/or circuit judges assigned to family court cases, five parenting coordinators, and two attorneys; it also names the ten board members. ([This link goes to the administrative order.](#))

Long-Range Issue #3: Improve Understanding of the Judicial Process

The judicial branch's legal authority is a grant by the people and public trust and confidence in the judicial branch is at the heart of maintaining a democratic society. Promoting public trust and confidence in the courts enhances the effectiveness of court actions, strengthens judicial impartiality, and improves the ability of courts to fulfill their mission. Improved communication, collaboration, and education efforts will better inform the public about the judicial branch's role, mission, and vision.

Studies have consistently demonstrated that when people have greater knowledge and understanding of the American justice system and the role of the courts within it, their confidence in and support for the courts is heightened. In aspiring to convey timely, consistent, and useful information to court audiences through traditional as well as innovative communication methods, and in developing educational events and activities for “students” of all ages, the judicial branch provides Floridians with a panoply of opportunities to learn about the role, functions, and accomplishments of their courts—and helps to foster a more engaged, active, and conscientious citizenry.

Branch-wide Court Communication Plan

In 2015, at the same time the Judicial Management Council was revising the branch's long-range plan, it was considering strategies for advancing the communication-related goals that the plan was readying to announce. Crafted with input from judges, court public information officers and other court staff, and the press, the branch-wide communication plan, *Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida 2016*, aims to help the courts build relationships with a variety of partners, enhance public understanding of and support for the branch, speak clearly and purposefully about the branch, support open lines of communication, and communicate effectively using coordinated, strategic efforts. For additional background about the communication plan, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 32).

Delivering Our Message is organized around four high priority strategic issues that must be addressed over the long term in order to achieve these levels of meaningful communication: Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence; Speaking with One Voice – Key Court Messages; Improving Communication Methods; and Strengthening Internal Communication. Although each strategic issue identifies a set of goals as well as suggested strategies for achieving those goals, the courts are given discretion to determine how to address them based on local needs and resources. To ensure that each court has the opportunity to develop creative solutions that work best for it, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga charged the courts' designated public information officers (PIOs) with putting the plan into effect in their respective circuits/DCAs. ([This link goes to the communication plan.](#))



Judge Nina Ashenafi-Richardson, Leon County, chaired the Judicial Management Council's Education and Outreach Workgroup, which drafted the branch's communication plan, *Delivering Our Message: Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida 2016*.

The courts' designated court public information officers are especially excited about opportunities to use social media as a communication tool—both to meet the needs of the public and to promote transparency. Twelve circuits, the supreme court, and OSCA have all integrated Twitter into their websites; in addition, three circuits, the supreme court, and OSCA all have Facebook accounts. Several courts are utilizing LinkedIn and Instagram as well. Moreover, two courts have begun podcasting, and the supreme court is getting ready to launch its first podcast.

Implementation began in January 2016, and in March, after participating in a two-and-a-half-day Court Community Communication Workshop to learn about their responsibilities in helping to realize the plan and to prepare themselves for this task, the PIOs agreed that one of their first undertakings should be to improve their outreach to the public and to develop effective public information programs. For many of Florida's state courts, this commitment has already been bearing fruit. Achievements include developing social media accounts; launching podcast series; improving their websites; establishing communication committees; and creating or expanding their educational programs.

PIOs are especially excited about opportunities to use social media as a communication tool—both to meet the needs of the public and to promote transparency. Twelve circuits (the second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, and twentieth), the supreme court, and OSCA have all integrated Twitter into their websites; in addition, three circuits (the sixth, ninth, and eighteenth), the supreme court, and OSCA all have Facebook accounts. Several courts are utilizing LinkedIn and Instagram as well. Moreover, two courts have begun podcasting—the Ninth Circuit began in August 2016, and the Eleventh Circuit began in February 2017—and the supreme court is getting ready to launch its first podcast (the first podcast will be an interview with the chief justice about the communication plan). [Take this link to access all the Florida courts' social media accounts.](#)



Court personnel gather for a photo at the end of the annual conference of the National Association for Court Management in July 2016. While several Florida court personnel gave a panel presentation on the necessity of communication planning (which drew national attention to the judicial branch's communication plan), others attended sessions on topics designed to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities, supporting their efforts to serve and perform at the highest possible levels; session topics included access to justice, online access to court services, ethics, strategic planning, and court innovations.

On another front, PIOs report that the communication plan has spurred their courts to give more, or new, thought to the organization and content on their websites; indeed, almost every circuit is either entirely redesigning its website or reorganizing and updating it. Meanwhile, the appellate courts have a workgroup that is tasked with developing a template for redesigning the website of each DCA and the supreme court. The aim of these efforts is to better serve the public and improve access to information.

One of the main goals of the communication plan is to promote a unified message and speak with one voice, and most courts have also been making strides in informing judges and employees about the importance of key court messages; courts have been discussing key messages in meetings with judges and court staff and are posting them on their websites.

Courts are also renewing their focus on educational outreach and relationship-building. For example, many courts have been working with the media to educate and inform them about policies, procedures, and court operations. Most courts are conducting courthouse tours, with many tailoring their tours to the type of group visiting. Also, chief judges have been actively involved in building and maintaining relationships with officials from all branches of government. [\(Take this link to read more about the wealth of court-community relationship-building activities that are taking place across the state.\)](#)

As they build on their work to meet the goals of the communication plan, Florida's court PIOs are looking to expand their websites, social media presence, educational programs, internal communication efforts, annual publications, and external outreach.

Education and Outreach Initiatives

One of the ways the judicial branch seeks to earn the public's trust and confidence is through creating opportunities for the people of Florida to learn about their courts. Every circuit and appellate court in Florida offers an inviting lineup of programs and activities that inform the public about the courts 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, juror appreciation events, “meet your judge” and “inside the courts” programs, adoption events, speakers bureaus, citizen advisory committees, and media outreach efforts. [\(This link goes to a compilation of court-community relationship activities by circuit and DCA\).](#) These activities are designed to educate people from all walks of life about the judicial branch, foster court-community relationships, and enhance people's trust and confidence in their justice system.

The [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 28) provides more information about branch efforts to deepen public understanding of the judicial process. This document also includes an extensive chronicle of branch endeavors to strengthen people's trust and confidence in their courts (p. 35). In addition, the [Education and Outreach tab](#) on the Florida Courts website offers a host of resources for enhancing viewers' knowledge of Florida's courts system. Described below are some of the other ways in which the branch strives to provide Floridians with positive, meaningful interactions with their courts.

Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums

Instituted in 1998, Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums are generally offered in the spring of election years for circuits in which a contested judicial election will be taking place. These 90-minute forums focus on the 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 weighty consequences of violations of Canon 7 of the *Code of Judicial Conduct*, which governs political conduct by judges and judicial candidates. 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. All judicial candidates are encouraged to attend, and the forums are also open to campaign managers and their staff, local political party chairs, presidents of local bar associations, the media, and the public. In May 2016, Judicial Campaign Conduct Forums were conducted in 10 cities across Florida.

Annual Reporters Workshop

Recognizing the importance of playing a proactive role in deepening reporters' understanding of the courts system, the supreme court has hosted an Annual Reporters Workshop since 1989. Presented by The Florida Bar Media and Communications Law Committee and subsidized by The Florida Bar Foundation, these two-day events are designed to teach the basics of legal reporting to journalists new to the legal/courts beat, providing them with a helpful introduction to covering justice system issues. Conducted by justices, judges, attorneys, professors, and veteran



The Ninth Circuit has a long history of creating public outreach programs and materials to enhance communication with court audiences and encourage strong court-community relations. One such program is Juror Appreciation Week, an opportunity to recognize the crucial contributions of jurors, whom Chief Judge Frederick J. Lauten calls “the lifeblood of the justice system.” Here, he and Judge Tanya Davis Wilson (Orange County) pose for a photo with a juror at the event.



Justice Ricky Polston welcomes annual Reporters Workshop attendees to the supreme court and answers their questions about the justice system.

reporters, the sessions vary from year to year, but they often focus on matters like effective techniques for reporting high-profile cases; merit retention in Florida; public records and how to get the records you need; libel law and defamation; lawyer regulation; and journalism in the world of social media.

Justice Teaching Initiative

A law-related education initiative that aims to partner every elementary, middle, and high school in the state with a legal professional, the Justice Teaching Initiative was founded by then Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis in 2006 and is coordinated by the Florida Law Related Education Association. Its goal 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 serve as resources for Justice Teaching, and all the state’s public schools, and hundreds of its private schools, have Justice Teaching volunteers. After registering for the program, volunteers participate in a training session before visiting their assigned school; armed with a wealth of lessons and interactive strategies that the supreme court features on its Justice Teaching website, these volunteers seek to involve students in engaging exchanges about the justice system and its effects on their lives. [\(Take this link to the Justice Teaching Initiative website.\)](#)



Justice James E.C. Perry leads the Justice Teaching Institute fellows on a Florida Constitution Scavenger Hunt.

Justice Teaching Institute

Initially designed in response to a national study documenting the public’s lack of, and need for, court-related information, this program 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, up to 25 secondary school teachers from across the state are selected to participate in this comprehensive, five-day education initiative on the fundamentals of the judicial branch. The program is sponsored and hosted by the supreme court, funded by The Florida Bar Foundation, and coordinated by the Florida Law Related Education Association. [\(Take this link to the Justice Teaching Institute webpage.\)](#)

Taught primarily by the seven justices, two “mentor judges,” and Ms Annette Boyd Pitts, executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, the institute introduces the teachers to the structure and functions of the state courts system, the state versus the federal courts systems, the criminal court process, the Florida constitution, the case study method, legal research skills, and the constitutional issues underlying an actual case that is about to be argued before the court. The highlight of the program is the teachers’ own mock oral argument on the very case for which the justice themselves are preparing. The Justice Teaching Institute is one of the courts system’s most promising efforts to introduce school children to the vital role courts play in our society. For more information about the Justice Teaching Institute, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 33).



Justice R. Fred Lewis talks about the exclusionary rule and probable cause with Justice Teaching Institute fellows.

Visiting the Supreme Court: Oral Arguments, Education Tours, and Education Programs

Visitors to the state capital can entertain a variety of options for learning about the history and functions of Florida's highest court and the fundamentals of Florida's courts system. One of the most intriguing ways to learn about the inner working of the supreme court is to attend an oral argument—a “conversation” between the justices and attorneys, during which the attorneys clarify the legal reasons for their position and answer questions posed by the justices. Oral arguments are held once a month and are open to the public. ([For more information about oral argument and the oral argument schedule, follow this link.](#)) Those who cannot attend oral arguments or who are interested in archived ones (going back to 1997) can view them online, via WFSU's Gavel to Gavel. ([This link goes to Gavel to Gavel.](#)) Information about high-profile supreme court cases, both current and archived, is also available online. ([Take this link for information about high-profile cases and other high-profile matters.](#))

The Florida Supreme Court also offers tours for student groups and for other groups of all ages. Visitors who are at least high-school age can take the guided, 45-minute Educational Tour; the guided Building Tour is available for all age groups; another option is the Self-Guided Tour, designed for those who prefer to furnish themselves with informational brochures and tour at their own pace.



After an education event on Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, the supreme court marshal, Silvester Dawson, poses for a photo in the courtroom with the children of supreme court and OSCA employees.

In addition, the court offers education programs for student groups and for various kinds of youth leadership groups. Teachers and other youth leaders bring groups of young people to the supreme court from all across the state—and the court is especially well-visited during the 60-day legislative session. These groups can participate in two different educational activities at the court. Fourth graders through college students can participate in the 40-minute Educational Program, which takes place in the supreme court courtroom. And for fifth graders through college students, the court offers the Mock Oral Argument Experience, a 75-minute program that prepares them to act out an oral argument using a hypothetical case. The majority of young visitors are on school trips, but youth leadership groups recently hosted by the court include Girls State, Boys State, 4-H, the Florida House/Senate Page and Messenger Programs, the Florida State University Criminal Justice Fraternity, the Close Up Foundation, and several high school and university moot court teams. All told, in the 2015 – 16 FY, the court led 138 Educational Tours and guided 51 student groups through the Mock Oral Argument Experience; between them, the two programs reached nearly 7,500 participants. ([This link goes to more information about the tours and education programs at the supreme court.](#))

The supreme court is also a popular destination for adult leadership groups of all kinds. These groups take a guided tour of the public areas of the building, and they are welcomed by, and learn something new about the justice system from, one of the justices. In the 2015 – 16 FY, 11 leadership groups, which comprised a total of 380 leaders, visited the court; among them were a group of civics teachers from Leon County Schools; members of the Association of Florida Colleges; the 2016 Leadership Tallahassee class; the information specialists from the Florida State Library and State Archives; members of a local church; and several Department of Children and Families Leadership Groups. For more information about supreme court tours and education programs, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 29).

Florida Supreme Court Library and Archives
Established in 1845, the Florida Supreme Court Library is the oldest of Florida’s state-supported libraries. It was originally designed for use by the supreme court and the attorneys who practice before it; however, it now serves the entire state courts system. Library staff also respond to calls for assistance from other law libraries, law firms, and state agencies, and the library is open to the public as well: people can do legal or historical research there, and school, family, and adult groups are invited to contemplate the treasures in the rare book room and admire the archival wonders on display in the reading room. [\(To visit the library’s website, follow this link.\)](#) For more background information about the supreme court library and archives, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 30).



Justice Peggy A. Quince talks to the 2017 Beaux of Tallahassee Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, about the courts and the legal rights and responsibilities of adults during the group’s recent visit to the Florida Supreme Court.



Chief Justice Jorge Labarga and Justice Charles T. Canady talk to a group of law students visiting the supreme court from the Levin College of Law, University of Florida.

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 FY 2015 – 16, the library archivist continued inventorying the papers of former Justice James Alderman (on the bench from 1978 – 1985); the justice’s speeches and his personal and administrative work papers are now catalogued. In addition, the archivist rehoused seven boxes of papers of the supreme court’s Gender Bias Study Commission (established in 1987), and he began arranging, rehousing, and creating a preliminary inventory of 37 boxes of papers of the supreme court’s Racial and Ethnic Bias Study Commission (established in 1989).



When the Magna Carta: Enduring Legacy, 1215 – 2015 exhibit was hosted at the Florida Supreme Court in February 2016, visitors flocked to the rotunda for a chance to learn about this important legal document and to see images from the Library of Congress' collection of medieval manuscripts, books, and other artifacts that tell the story of the Great Charter and explain its role in catalyzing the rule of law.



The High School Moot Court Competition, a program of the Florida Law Related Education Association, offers students a unique opportunity to learn about the appellate process: students write and submit briefs for evaluation, and, if selected, they present oral arguments before an appellate judging panel using a fictitious constitutional case. Students who make it to the final round, such as those pictured here, present their oral arguments before the justices in the Florida Supreme Court Courtroom.

Recent donations to the archives include court papers related to the 1998 revision of section 14 to Article V of the Florida Constitution (commonly known as Revision 7) as well as 10 boxes of notebooks and papers associated with the Florida Innocence Commission (2009 – 2012); former Justice Rosemary Barkett (on the bench from 1985 – 94) also donated boxes containing memorabilia, articles and videos about her, and papers dealing with administrative matters. In addition, the 1847 book *The Florida War*, a contemporary account of the Second Seminole War that is considered one of the most significant accounts of Florida History, was donated to the rare book collection. [\(Follow this link to learn about the materials housed in the archives.\)](#)

Finally, in the supreme court rotunda, the library prepared an exhibit of books and documents of the Bourbon era of Florida history (1987 – 1902)—a period during which former slave owners and wealthy elites from before the Civil War regained control of state and local government, created a new state constitution that institutionalized their power, and launched the economic development of the state that continues to this day. The display contained a number of original items that date back to this era.

Also, from February 15 – 26, 2016, the rotunda offered a rare and special treat for those who work in the supreme court and for its visitors: a traveling exhibit honoring the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta by King John of England at Runnymede in 1215. “Magna Carta: Enduring Legacy 1215 – 2015,” which consisted of images of objects from the Library of Congress collection, illustrated the importance of this “Great Charter,” considered one of the most important legal documents in the history of democracy—and one of the most enduring symbols of liberty under the rule of law.

Court Publications

To familiarize people with the judicial branch and to enhance communication between the courts and other justice system entities, the legislature, and the executive branch, OSCA's Innovations and Outreach Unit, under the direction of the supreme court, produces the *Florida State Courts Annual Report* each year. [\(This link goes to the annual reports.\)](#) In addition, several times each year, the Innovations and Outreach 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. [\(Take this link to the newsletters.\)](#)

Long-Range Issue #4:**Modernize the Administration of Justice and Operation of Court Facilities**

The administration of a state court system serving millions of people each year is a complex undertaking. Managing the court system resources and personnel is further complicated by growing customer expectations, ever more complex legal issues and cases, and rapidly changing technology. The judicial branch's ability to assess its environment and respond appropriately will enhance the broad range of court services and technology solutions designed to meet the needs of court users.

People expect that their court system will operate effectively, efficiently, and conveniently; that due process will be followed; that disputes will be resolved justly and in a timely manner; and that appropriate information will be available to them promptly and without undue expense. To meet these expectations, Florida's courts system—which disposes over 3.7 million cases each year—must constantly find ways to improve the processes used to accomplish its constitutional mission. Toward that end, the judicial branch continues to make advances in the use of technology to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness, and security of court processes. At the same time, it takes seriously its responsibility to keep the doors of the courthouse open and to protect all judges, court personnel, court users, and court facilities from emergencies—both human-made and nature-driven—that have the potential to disrupt court operations and delay justice.

Court Technology

Florida's judicial branch is increasingly deploying technology to facilitate the effective, efficient, and fair disposition of cases in a timely manner. Technology is now an inherent and inextricable component of the daily operations of the judiciary. In recent years, for instance, Florida's courts have made significant advances in upgrading case management systems, continuing the implementation of electronic case filing, working with electronic case files, and automating business processes. For background information about some of the courts system's most promising technology initiatives—e-filing, the Appellate Courts Technology Solutions, the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System, remote court interpreting, the *Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan*, and electronic access to the courts—please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 48).



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

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 sunset or placed in inactive status; such is the case with the Compliance Subcommittee and the Operational Procedure Review Workgroup, for instance. And when the commission takes on a new task, it creates an additional body to address it; recent examples are the Rules of Judicial Administration Joint Workgroup and the Interpreter Data Workgroup. The commission is chaired by Judge Lisa Taylor Munyon, Ninth Circuit. ([Take this link to access the commission's 2016 annual report.](#))

Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System

One of the responsibilities of the Commission on Trial Court Performance and Accountability (TCP&A) is to spearhead technology-based strategies for moving cases more efficiently and effectively through the trial court process. In December 2012, the branch had a momentous breakthrough when, after an intensive two-year collaboration, the TCP&A, together with its Court Statistics and Workload Committee and with the Florida Courts Technology Commission, released the *Trial Court Integrated Management Solution* (TIMS) report, which provided 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. In short, this report defined the kind of data the courts need to collect about the activity of the courts as well as the kind of system the branch needs to build in order to collect these data. The supreme court accepted the recommendations of the TIMS report in March 2013, and since that turning point, the branch has been working on a series of small, self-contained projects that will eventually be “snapped together” to form what is now being called the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System. For more about this system and about the TIMS report, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 50).

The TCP&A has been monitoring the development of two key elements of the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System. One is the Court Application Processing System (CAPS), which is a computer application designed for in-court and in-chambers use by trial judges or their staff to access and use electronic case files and other data sources in the course of managing cases, scheduling and conducting hearings, adjudicating disputed issues, and recording and reporting judicial activity. The second is the Judicial Data Management Services Project (JDMS), a state-level data management strategy that will be able to pull court activity data from multiple sources and integrate them into a coherent whole. Lately, the commission has been focusing on two significant components of the JDMS: the Trial Court Performance Management Framework and the Uniform Case Reporting Project, which are described below.



Trial Court Performance Management Framework

In 2014, the supreme court directed the TCP&A to develop “recommendations on a performance management framework for the trial courts with an emphasis on articulating long-term objectives for better quantifying performance to identify potential problems and take corrective action in the effective use of court resources.”

Performance management relies on the use of data and computed measures in decision-making. The performance management framework sought by the supreme court would help to ensure that courts are guided by the notion of due process as well as gauge whether administrative practices are working as desired. Long-term goals for such a framework would include identifying better management practices for improving the statewide collection and use of performance measurement data.

To address the supreme court’s directive, the TCP&A chair, Judge Moreland, established a Performance Management Workgroup, appointing Judge Victor Hulslander, Eighth Circuit, as chair. Based on the National Center for State Courts’ High Performance Court Framework for using data collected under a statewide court data model, a year-long review of national literature, and input from the circuits, the workgroup prepared a report, which it submitted to the supreme court in June 2016. In developing *Recommendations on a Performance Management Framework for Florida’s Trial Court: Phase One, Foundations for a Performance Management Framework*, workgroup members envisioned what the branch is going to look like in 10 years and then worked backwards to try to determine what type of data-collection system is needed today to achieve that vision. The report includes the goal and scope of the performance management framework, essential element principles and administrative principles of the framework, and long-term objectives of the framework.

The supreme court approved the recommendations in 2016, and in an administrative order, it charged the TCP&A with continuing its work to develop the performance management framework, specifying an order of priorities. [\(This link goes to the TCP&A’s administrative order.\)](#)

Uniform Case Reporting Project

The Uniform Case Reporting Project, the second component of the JDMS on which the TCP&A has recently been focusing, is a data collection project designed to capture the case activity data that the Performance Management Framework has deemed necessary for achieving process improvement. This project was propelled by a February 2015 report of the Judicial Management Council's Performance Workgroup, which recommended that the TCP&A propose clerk collection and reporting requirements that address the collection of specific data elements, detail the transmission of that data in a prescribed format, and establish a meaningful timeframe necessary to enhance performance reporting.

Overseen by the TCP&A's Court Statistics and Workload Committee, the UCR Project is actually a descendent of one of the technology components of the courts system's Foreclosure Initiative. This initiative, which was implemented from 2013 – 2015 to help judges reduce the glut of backlogged foreclosure cases while protecting the rights of the parties involved in litigation, included the development of a data collection plan that tracked and monitored case activity data, providing, for instance, the specific cases filed, the specific cases disposed, and the specific cases that were still pending. Realized in June 2014, this data collection plan represented a standardized way of calculating and looking at workload, and it provided all levels of court with critical information concerning the movement of foreclosure cases through the courts. For more about the Foreclosure Initiative, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 25).



In April 2016, the supreme court issued an administrative order in which it revised and expanded the existing clerk of court data reporting requirements for foreclosure cases to all case types. The order also directed the clerks of the circuit court to increase the data elements, thereby providing the courts with additional information about court system workload (on case inventory and status assignment, summary reporting system case type and disposition assignment, and post-judgment reopen and re-closure activity for all case types), and to electronically transmit the data to OSCA directly through an approved interface. ([Take this link to read the administrative order regarding the new uniform case reporting requirements.](#))

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Since the Foreclosure Initiative ended, the UCR Project has been making some significant advances in the branch's data collection system. For instance, the UCR Project will be the first statewide courts system initiative to use web services, an architecture that will facilitate the easy exchange of data, regardless of the data applications or systems being used; at last, the clerks', circuits', and OSCA's systems will all be able to "talk to" one another. And to ensure it is collecting data that are as reliable and accurate as possible, OSCA will expand its system to accept streaming data; the clerks will be able to send the record any time a change is made. All these steps will improve the quality and timeliness of the information being collected.

Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup

Another major technology initiative in which the TCP&A has been involved is the use of remote interpreting systems to facilitate sharing interpreting resources among different circuits, thereby containing the costs of interpreting resources while maintaining accuracy.

Court interpreting services are essential in ensuring the constitutional right of access to justice. According to US Census Bureau statistics (2015), approximately 12% of Florida's residents have limited English proficiency. Courts continue to face challenges in addressing the increased needs for quality interpreting services amid a short supply of qualified interpreters. While large population centers are home to more interpreters, rural areas of the state lack the same resources. By embracing technology, Florida's courts system can eliminate these geographical impediments. Shared use of remote interpreting services represents an opportunity for courts to significantly improve interpreter services through enhanced technological communications, while also using state resources wisely. For some background about shared remote interpreting services in Florida's trial courts, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 51).



Remote interpreting systems facilitate sharing interpreting resources among different court facilities within the same circuit, or even among different circuits, thereby containing the costs of interpreting resources while maintaining accuracy. Pictured here is an interpreter in the Ninth Circuit utilizing a remote interpreting system.

In 2014, after a successful pilot program that explored how court interpreter resources can be utilized using virtual remote interpreting technology, the TCP&A established the Shared Remote Interpreting Workgroup, directing it to make recommendations on the business processes associated with sharing remote interpreting across circuit jurisdictions. Chaired by Mr. Thomas Genung, trial court administrator for the Nineteenth Circuit, the workgroup included members from the TCP&A, the Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC), and the Court Interpreter Certification Board.

After the joint workgroup completed an extensive court interpreting data collection effort and developed recommendations for improving access to qualified interpreter services, the TCP&A, in October 2016, submitted a report to the supreme court entitled *Recommendations on Shared Remote Interpreting Services in Florida's Trial Courts*. The report includes six recommendations: establish a statewide pool of court interpreters who are certified in accordance with the Florida Rules for Certification and Regulation of Spoken Language Court Interpreters; establish statewide education and training provisions on virtual remote interpreting; require each interpreter participating in the statewide pool to track virtual remote interpreting events by entering information into a local system; allow interpreters to take an oath administered by the presiding judge that would remain valid as long as the interpreter is employed; establish a governance committee to make recommendations to the TCP&A, the Court Interpreter Certification Board, and the TCBC regarding management and oversight issues of the statewide pool; and authorize the governance committee to monitor funding needs of the circuits and make recommendations to the TCBC.

After the court approved the recommendations in December 2016, the TCP&A established a Shared Remote Interpreting Governance Committee. [\(This link goes to the administrative order adopting the workgroup's recommendations.\)](#) Chaired by Chief Judge Elizabeth Metzger, Nineteenth Circuit, this committee will be responsible for establishing the statewide court interpreting pool for remote interpreting and for developing recommendations regarding additional funding needs, collecting workload data and needs-based funding information, and overseeing administrative/management issues associated with shared remote interpreting.

Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan: 2015 – 2019

Developed by a Trial Court Budget Commission workgroup and adopted by the supreme court in January 2015, the *Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan* identifies the critical business capabilities and the corresponding technical capabilities that the trial courts must have in order to function effectively. ([This link goes to the technology strategic plan.](#)) Through the legislative process, the judicial branch continues to pursue funding to implement and sustain the technology projects identified in the plan.

The branch has identified, and seeks to secure funding for, the following crucial technology needs:

- Hardware and software to receive and manage case files electronically (the branch aspires to build on its investment in the Court Application Processing System, which provides judges and court staff with electronic case file information and functionality needed to perform their adjudicatory function);
- Functional digital court reporting systems (audio and video hardware and software will support service delivery of recording the official court record);
- Remote court interpreting equipment (the branch seeks to expand the regional remote interpreting technology pilot—in which nine circuits are currently participating—to accommodate statewide implementation, which will allow for the pooling of limited resources for certified interpreters and will provide a more consistent level of interpreting services across the state);
- Sufficient bandwidth (additional bandwidth will accommodate remote interpreting as well as e-filing, increased web-based services, and increased digital traffic);
- A minimum level of technology services in communities across the state (the branch seeks to ensure core function capabilities for smaller counties as well as skilled staff to support court-specific systems in all counties and judicial circuits);

In developing a robust technology infrastructure in the trial courts, the branch will be better positioned to help ensure equal justice to Floridians in all 20 circuits. For more about the technology strategic plan, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 52).

Electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution

The branch continues to move forward with its existing technology solutions to help streamline and aid in the administration of judicial processes such as case management, document management, workflow management, and the seamless integration with electronic filing. The appellate courts have been participating in the electronic Florida Appellate Courts Technology Solution (eFACTS) project to facilitate and advance case management operations.

eFACTS, developed by OSCA's Office of Information Technology, was piloted at the supreme court and the Second DCA. It utilizes a Microsoft web application platform and includes document management, electronic workflows, electronic voting, remote access via a secured web application, tracking of administrative matters, assignment and working document tracking, calendaring, public on-line dockets, and secured access to case information. In 2016, modifications to eFACTS included person/entity management, docketing, and case search and reporting enhancements, and new additions included a recusal tracking feature. In addition, the Office of Information Technology has been making backend improvements to enhance the performance, reliability, and supportability of eFACTS.



The supreme court and the five DCA applications continue to be modified to accommodate the needs and preferences of clerks, judges, and court staff. Now, the Office of Information Technology is focused on retiring the legacy components of the existing case management system and on facilitating integration and unification of eFACTS. The office is being guided by a three-year plan that started in 2016; specific deliverables are due at each year end, and the plan is subject to periodic review and change by the eFACTS Change Advisory Board.

For more background about the Appellate Courts Technology Solutions, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 50).

Emergency Preparedness

The 9/11 tragedy galvanized the courts system's 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." He urged the workgroup to be guided by two policy goals: protect the health and safety of everyone inside the courts, and keep the courts open to ensure justice for the people.

After the work group's recommendations were approved, each court identified its mission-essential functions; developed a preparedness plan that includes emergency and administrative procedures as well as a continuity of operations plan; and designated an emergency coordinating officer, a court emergency management team (to maintain court operations in a disaster situation), and a public information officer (to assist in the coordination of emergency response activities and provide information to, and answer questions from, the media and the public). At the same time, the supreme

court established the United Supreme Court/Branch Court Emergency Management Group to recommend policy for, prepare for, and respond to emergencies both in the supreme court building and in state courts across Florida. For more background about the judicial branch's emergency management measures, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 54).

Emergency management comprises preparation for unpreventable natural disasters such as tropical storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and pandemics. It also signifies being prepared for human-made calamities such as oil spills, biohazards, extended information systems outages, and military or terrorist attack-related incidents. Central to the judicial branch's constitutional mandate to be open to every person for redress of any injury is the safety and security of court users who are conducting business in court facilities, judicial officers, and court personnel. Thus preparing for threats and emergencies is an ongoing responsibility. One of the branch's recent endeavors is the creation of the Task Force on Appellate Court Safety and Security, established by the supreme court in September 2015. Chaired by Supreme Court Marshal Silvester Dawson, this task force has been developing standards and best practices relating to the safety of the supreme court and the DCAs; among the issues it addresses are security staffing models and levels, safety policies and practices, security personnel qualifications and training, site hardening, weapons and other security equipment, dignitary protection, state and federal regulations affecting safety in appellate court facilities, and disaster preparedness. [\(This link goes to the administrative order currently shaping the work of the task force.\)](#)

Another recent endeavor is the Trial Court Security Workgroup, established by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga in August 2016 under the umbrella of the Judicial Management Council. Increasing incidences of mass violence prompted the Judicial Management Council to recommend that trial court security be its next area of focus, and it proposed the creation of a workgroup to direct its attention to security standards of operation and best practices. Chaired by Judge Margaret Steinbeck, Twentieth Circuit, this workgroup is evaluating security procedures, practices, and perceptions at Florida's courthouses; reviewing national courthouse security procedures and consulting with professionals and experts on



On Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, Silvester Dawson, the marshal of the supreme court (on left), and Matthew Vickery, the deputy marshal supervisor, talk to the children of supreme court and OSCA employees about what they would do if a "bad guy" entered the building with the intent to do harm.

model practices; identifying important elements of security in trial court facilities; developing standards, model procedures, and recommendations for appropriate training; establishing criteria for a statewide reporting system for security incidents; and identifying effective partnerships and opportunities for partnerships in providing and promoting security in courthouses. [\(Take this link to read the press release announcing the creation of this workgroup.\)](#)

Generally, the emergencies that buffet Florida are weather-connected (the Sunshine State, called the most hurricane-prone state in the nation by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, has been pounded by 40 percent of the hurricanes that have hit the US). After nearly 11 years since Hurricane Wilma battered Florida (October 2005), two afflicted the state in late 2016: Hurricane Hermine struck the Florida Panhandle in September, and Hurricane Matthew assaulted the east coast in October. Out of an abundance of caution, and to ensure the safety of judges, court staff, and court users, numerous courts had to close for a few days until power was restored and cars could once again safely navigate the tree-limb-strewn streets. Emergencies of any sort expose areas that can use improvement, and these hurricanes prompted court emergency management team members to review their continuity of operations plan and make necessary adjustments to ensure that their court is as prepared as possible to respond to crises, recover from them, and mitigate against their impact.

To support emergency preparedness efforts in courts across the state, Steven Hall, the chief of OSCA's General Services Unit and the branch's statewide emergency coordinating officer, organizes monthly conference calls for all the courts system's emergency coordinating officers. Recent topics include updating continuity of operations plans, site hardening, power outages, problems associated with courts' reliance on internet-based phone service (problematic when power is lost), and establishing sound strategies for communicating with staff when emergency situations arise. He also continues to update and expand the emergency preparedness resources available on the Florida courts intranet and internet sites. The information and resources on these page are intended to keep judges and court staff informed about preparedness efforts at work and to provide tips and tools they can use at home to keep themselves and their families safe.



Emergency preparedness includes knowing how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The Marshal's Office at the supreme court periodically offers CPR Certification classes for supreme court and OSCA employees. Here, Robert Smith, deputy marshal with the supreme court, demonstrates the correct way to perform CPR on an infant.

Long-Range Issue #5:

Maintain a Professional, Ethical, and Skilled Judiciary and Workforce

Justice depends on the competence and quality of judges and court employees. These professionals handle complex legal issues and court procedures, address difficult legal and ethical issues, and face increased expectations from court users. Providing advanced levels of education and development will enable those who work within the courts system to effectively perform the challenging work of the courts and meet the needs of those whom they serve.

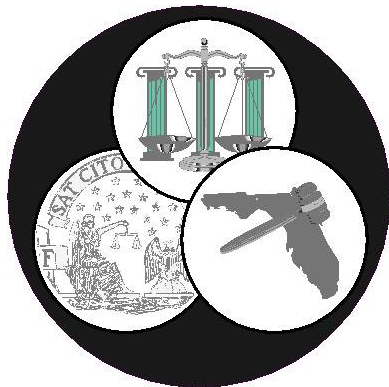
To meet the demands of justice in the twenty-first century, judicial officers and court staff must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve and perform at the highest professional levels. Recognizing this imperative, the long-range plan recommends that the branch "provide timely education and training to judges and court employees to ensure high-level performance."

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

Various entities within the judicial branch are committed to developing high-quality education and training opportunities for the people who work in Florida’s courts, making efficient and effective use of limited funding and staff resources. For instance, members of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Diversity, with the help of the courts system’s 26 diversity teams and the judges who have become certified diversity trainers, offer diversity trainings to local, regional, and statewide audiences. In addition, many circuits and DCAs design continuing education programs for select categories of their court personnel (e.g., court interpreters, staff attorneys, managers). Moreover, several OSCA units develop or facilitate education programs for judges, court personnel, and justice system partners across the state: for example, the Office of Court Improvement regularly coordinates live education opportunities as well as web-based trainings for family court and problem-solving court professionals; the Florida Dispute Resolution Center facilitates an annual statewide conference for mediators and also conducts county mediation training programs and continuing mediation education trainings across the state each year; the Court Services Unit routinely offers orientation workshops and administers written and oral language exams for foreign language interpreters seeking to interpret for the courts; and the branch’s statewide ADA coordinator organizes statewide education programs for the circuit and appellate courts’ ADA coordinators. Readers can learn about this bounty of instructional offerings elsewhere in this annual report.



During phase one of the Florida Judicial College, trial court judges who are new to the bench, as well as new general magistrates and child support enforcement hearing officers, learn about Communication Skills: The Art of Judging from Judge Kathleen Kroll, Fifteenth Circuit.



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 Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, the council, with the support of OSCA’s Court Education Section,

provides continuing education through live programs, both statewide and local, and through distance learning events, publications, and other self-learning resources. For additional background on court education in Florida, please see the [Short History of Florida State Courts System Processes, Programs, and Initiatives](#) (p. 55); also available in this document is a History of Judiciary Education in Florida (p. 58).

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. To help judges meet their education obligations, the Florida Court Education Council works closely each year with the leaders of the 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—and the two judicial colleges—the Florida Judicial College and the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies.

During the 2015 – 16 FY, annual education programs were offered by the Florida Conference of District Court of Appeal Judges (64 participants), the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges (437 participants), and the Conference of County Court Judges of Florida (284 participants). In addition, the Florida Judicial College, designed for trial court judges who are new to the bench as well as all new general magistrates and child support enforcement hearing officers, facilitated its three-phase program: Phase I is a pre-bench program that includes a series of orientation sessions and a trial skills workshop (47 attendees); Phase II focuses on more substantive and procedural matters and includes a “Fundamentals” portion for judges who are preparing to rotate to a new division (86 attendees); the third phase consists of a year-long mentoring program for new judges. The Florida Judicial College also offered its New Appellate Judges Program for the judges new to the appellate bench (five participants). Also during the 2015 – 16 FY, judges and quasi-judicial officers could apply to attend the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies, a comprehensive continuing judicial education program for those seeking to hone existing skills or to delve deeply into a subject matter area (292 judges and quasi-judicial officers attended). The FCEC also sponsored a DUI Adjudication Lab (12 attendees). And it also supported two Faculty Training Courses, which are two-day trainings designed to teach judges how to be effective teachers of other judges (27 attendees altogether); thanks to the extensive roster of faculty-trained judges, judicial education leaders are able to offer the hundreds of hours of continuing judicial education needed each year.

Education for Court Personnel

The long-range plan emphasizes that, like judges, court employees should receive timely education and training to ensure high-level performance. To meet this goal, the FCEC’s Florida Court Personnel Committee, chaired by Judge Angela Cowden, Tenth Circuit, with the support of OSCA’s Court Education Section, continues to develop education and training opportunities for employees who work within the courts system.

Since 2008, the FCEC has provided funding for numerous statewide education initiatives for court personnel groups as well as funding assistance to support local education programs developed by court personnel. In FY 2015 – 16, four statewide events and nine local events received funding assistance. The Florida Court Personnel Committee’s big, statewide event is the Florida Court Personnel Institute. A two-



Collegiality is one of the many topics addressed at the New Appellate Judges Program; talking about it here (l – r) are Judge Kevin Emas, Third DCA; Judge Nelly Khouzam, Second DCA; Judge Kent Wetherell, First DCA; and Judge Spencer Levine, Fourth DCA.



Diversity Faculty Training was one of four tracks offered at the 2016 Florida Court Personnel Institute; pictured here are the attendees with the instructors: Judge Scott Bernstein, Eleventh Circuit; Judge Peter Estrada, Tenth Circuit; Judge Claudia Isom, Thirteenth Circuit; and Ms Michelle Seabrooks, Human Resource Officer with OSCA.

day program tailored to the education needs of Florida’s court employees, the 2016 Florida Court Personnel Institute offered four tracks: Advanced Leadership in Practice, Effectively Communicating in the Modern Workplace, Making the Most of Communication, and Diversity Faculty Training (for those seeking to conduct diversity trainings for other court employees); altogether, 103 court personnel participated in this institute; the 2017 program, which took place in February and was attended by 106 court employees, marked the sixth consecutive year in which the institute has been offered. The other three statewide programs funded by the FCEC in FY 2015 – 16 were the Florida Trial Court Staff Attorneys Conference (19 attendees), the Judicial Assistants Association of Florida Conference (42 attendees), and the Court Community Communication Program (32 participated in this training for Florida court public information officers). The nine local training programs that received FCEC funding addressed topics like cross-cultural communication, essential skills for managers, essential interpersonal skills for court staff, moving beyond diversity, court purposes and processes, and purposes and responsibilities of courts; altogether, 592 court employees benefited from these local education events. Also in FY 2015 – 16, the FCEC supported the Trial Court Administrators Annual Education Program (31 attendees), the Appellate Marshals Education Program (three attendees), and the Appellate Clerks Education Program (four attendees).

Publications and Other Self-Learning Resources

To supplement the scope of training and educational offerings for judges and court personnel, the long-range plan recommends that the branch “develop technology-based approaches to complement existing education programs for judges and court employees.” To help the courts system achieve this goal, the FCEC supports judicial and staff efforts to develop new court education publications, update existing ones, devise distance learning events, and expand the online Court Education Resource Library.



The FCEC’s Publications Committee, with the assistance of OSCA’s Court Education Section, worked steadily to boost its repository of online publications during the 2015 – 16 FY. Among those updated were *A Judge’s Guide to the Practices, Procedures, and Appropriate Use of General Magistrates*, *Child Support Enforcement Hearing Officers*, and *Special Magistrates Serving Within the Florida State Courts System*; *An Aid to Understanding Canon 7*; *Civil Jury Trial Benchbook*; *Contempt Benchguide*; *Criminal Benchguide for Circuit Judges*; *Disqualification and Recusal Benchguide*; *Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee Opinions: Topical Index*; *Judicial Administration Benchguide*; *OSCA Employee Manual*; and *Small Claims Survival Guide*. Since then, a number of other publications have been updated, including the *Baker Act Benchguide*, *Civil Jury Trial Benchbook*, *Duty Judge Benchbook*, *Fundamentals for Traffic Hearing Officers Manual*, *Judicial Ethics Benchguide*, and *Residential Foreclosure Benchbook*. Moreover, on a quarterly basis, the committee continues to produce its cumulative and indexed *Domestic Violence Case Law Summaries* and its *Traffic-Related Appellate Opinion Summaries*.



Resource Library

In addition, distance education was available on the following topics: Judicial Ethics, Perceptions of Bias and Fairness; Stereotypes and Misconceptions; Virtual Court for Domestic Violence; Dependency Court Shelter Hearings; Human Trafficking; Managing the Mediation Process Using Psychogeography; and Fundamentals for Family Court Judges.

The Publications Committee also continues to build the online Court Education Resource Library, which provides browsers with access to a range of educational materials: links to publications and other materials prepared by the committee and various OSCA units; materials from live court education programs and other education events; and useful articles, curricula, handbooks and reports from other state and national organizations.

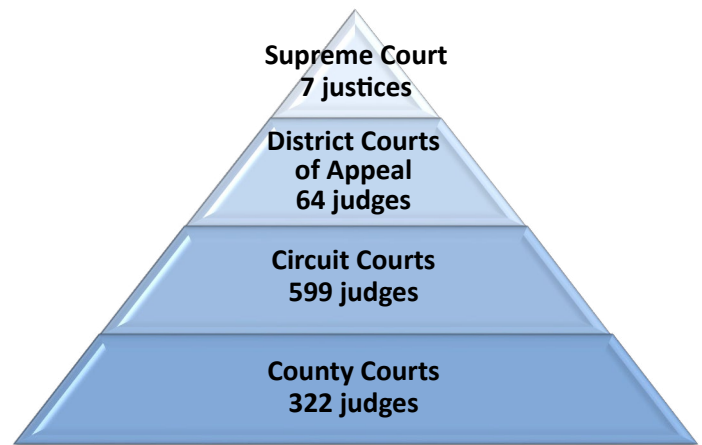
Finally, at the Publications Committee’s direction, OSCA completed the development and preliminary testing of a responsive user interface to serve as an additional entry point into the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee opinions posted on the Sixth Judicial Circuit’s website. This interface was designed specifically for access by mobile devices (smart phones, tablets, etc.). The interface can be accessed at <http://mobile.flcourts.org/jeac/>.

FLORIDA'S COURT STRUCTURE

Florida's Court Structure

Florida's court system consists of the following entities: two appellate level courts (the supreme court and five district courts of appeal) and two trial level courts (20 circuit courts and 67 county courts). The chief justice (who may serve successive two-year terms, not to exceed a total of eight years) presides as the chief administrative officer of the judicial branch.

On July 1, 1972, the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) was created with initial emphasis on developing a uniform case reporting system in order to provide information about activities of the judiciary. Additional responsibilities include preparing the operating budget for the judicial branch, projecting the need for new judges, and serving as the liaison between the court system and the auxiliary agencies of the court, national court research and planning agencies, the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the public, business community, and media.



Appellate Courts

Supreme Court

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

District Courts of Appeal

- 64 judges, six-year terms
- Five districts:
 - 1st District: Tallahassee, 15 judges
 - 2nd District: Lakeland, 16 judges
 - 3rd District: Miami, 10 judges
 - 4th District: West Palm Beach, 12 judges
 - 5th District: Daytona Beach, 11 judges
- Cases generally reviewed by three-judge panels

Trial Courts

Circuit Courts

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

County Courts

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

FLORIDA'S COURT STRUCTURE

Supreme Court of Florida

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

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

District Courts of Appeal

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

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

Circuit Courts

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

County Courts

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

DCA

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

Office of the State Courts Administrator

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

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

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



State Courts Administrator Patricia "PK" Jameson.

Trial Court Administrators

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

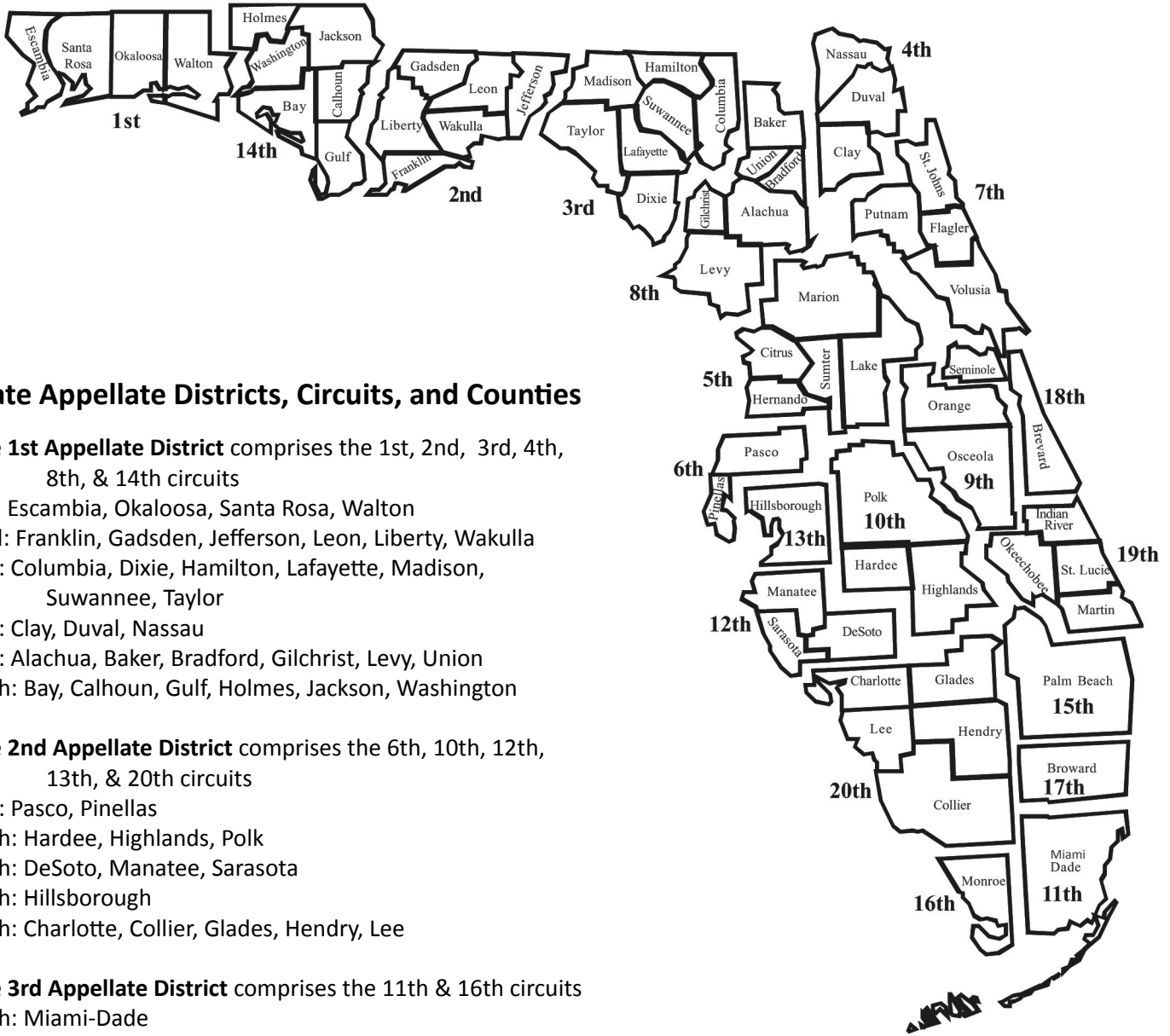
Trial court administrators have multiple responsibilities. They manage judicial operations such as courtroom scheduling, facilities management, caseload policy, ADA policy, statistical analysis, inter-branch and intergovernmental relations, technology planning, jury oversight, public information, and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

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

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, Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie

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
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
2015	0	0	0	n/a	64
2016	0	0	0	n/a	64

Circuit

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2008	44	19	0	0%	599
2010	40	37	0	0%	599
2012	31	23	0	0%	599
2014	24	7	0	0%	599
2016	13	1	0	0%	599

County

Session Year	Requested	Certified	Authorized	% Authorized (of those certified)	Total
2007	15	13	0	0%	322
2008	46	42	0	0%	322
2009	61	39	0	0%	322
2010	54	53	0	0%	322
2011	55	54	0	0%	322
2012	49	48	0	0%	322
2013	49	47	0	0%	322
2014	42	39	0	0%	322
2015	36	32	0	0%	322
2016	26	23	0	0%	322

Judicial Certification

The supreme court has used a weighted caseload system to evaluate the need for new trial court judgeships since 1999, and, for DCA judges, since 2006. The weighted caseload system analyzes Florida's caseload statistics according to complexity. Cases that are typically complex, such as capital murder cases, receive a higher weight, while cases that are generally less complex, such as civil traffic cases, receive a lower weight. These weights are then applied to case filing statistics to determine the need for additional judgeships.

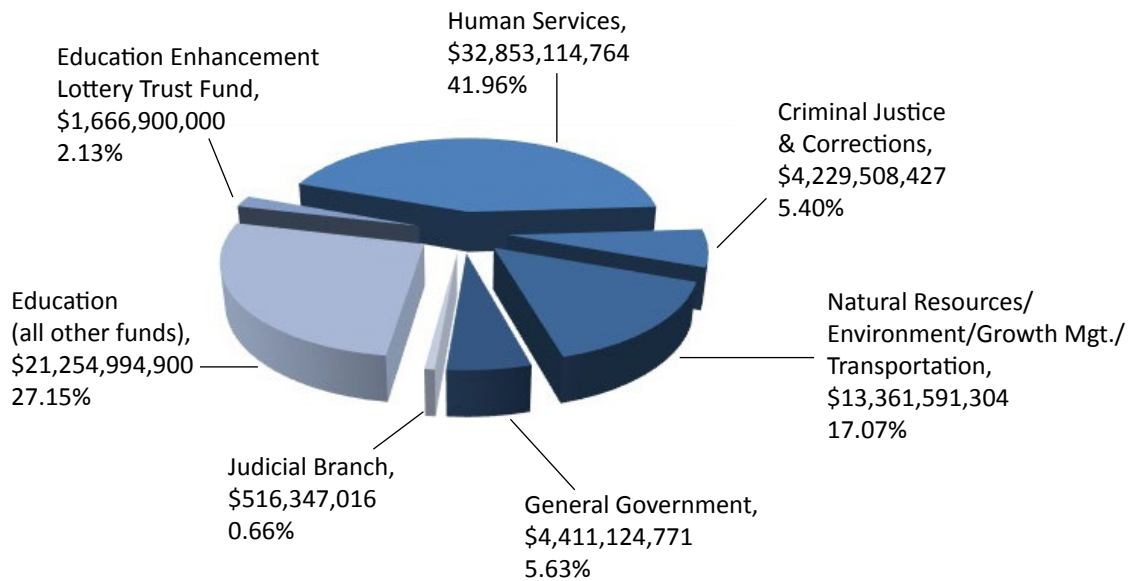
The need for additional judgeships remains high for several reasons: an absence of funding for previously certified judgeships, overall increases in judicial workload, and fewer support staff. If judicial workload continues to exceed capacity and the judicial need deficit is not addressed, likely consequences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

In a November 2015 opinion, the Florida Supreme Court certified the need for 24 additional judges: one circuit judge and 23 county court judges. However, the Florida Legislature did not approve funding for any new judgeships this year ([take this link to the opinion](#)).

FLORIDA'S BUDGET

2015-2016 Fiscal Year State Appropriations

(For an accessible version of the FY 2015 - 2016 and the FY 2016 - 2017 appropriations, please follow [this link](#))

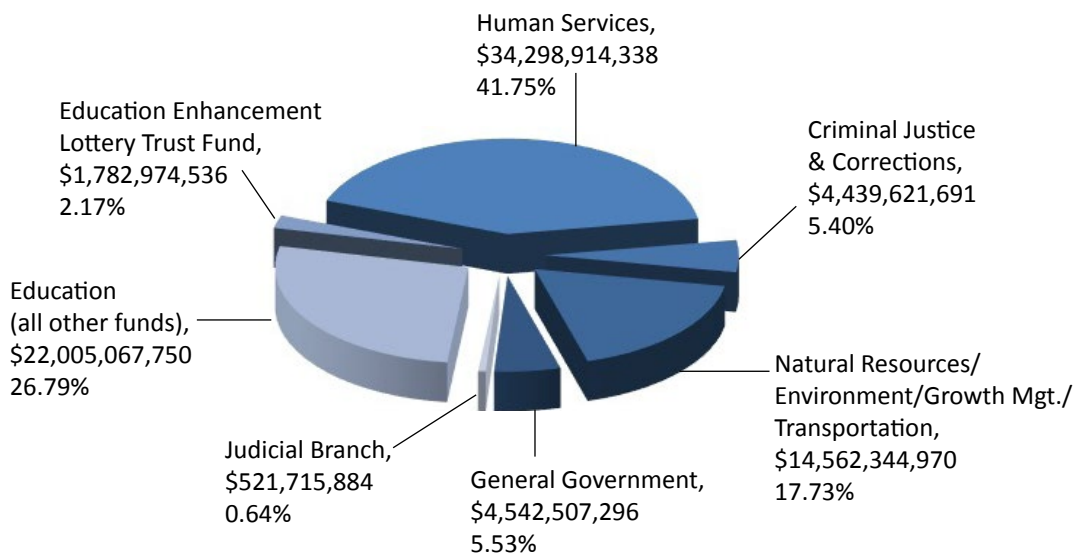


Total State Appropriations: \$78,293,581,182

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

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

2016-2017 Fiscal Year State Appropriations



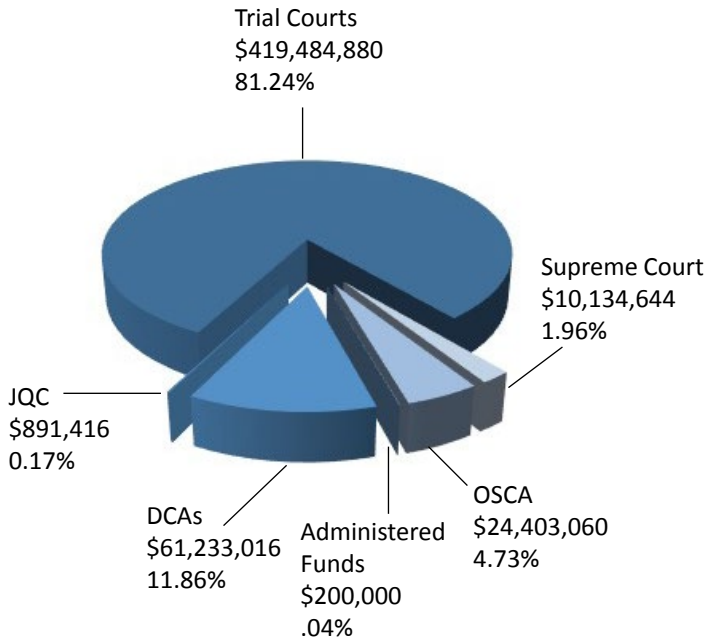
Total State Appropriations: \$82,153,146,465

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

STATE COURTS SYSTEM APPROPRIATIONS

2015-2016 Fiscal Year State Courts System Appropriations

[\(For an accessible version of the FY 2015 - 2016 and the FY 2016 - 2017 appropriations, please follow this link\)](#)



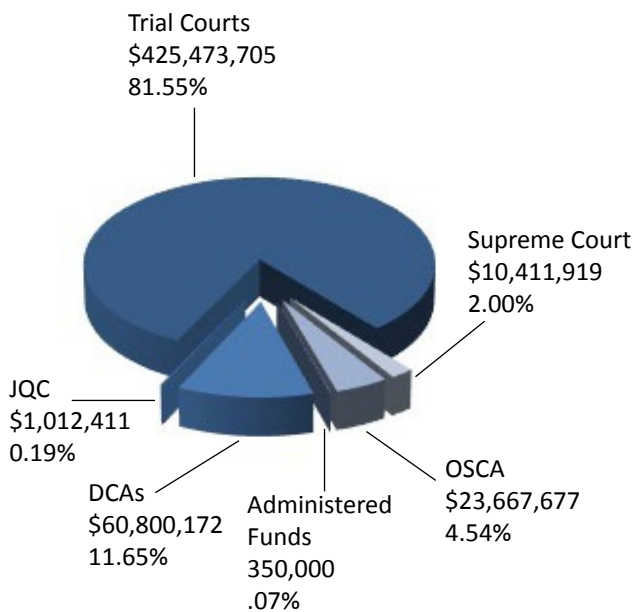
State Courts System Total: \$516,347,016

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, SB 2500A, less vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$13.9 million for pass through/ legislative project funding, i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts; \$17.4 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$6.2 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2014-15 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Justice System Appropriations

State Courts System	\$516,347,016
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$92,018,319
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$43,552,200
State Attorneys	\$437,814,723
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$216,634,714
Public Defenders Appellate	\$16,220,063
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$9,851,894
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$42,441,041
Total	\$1,374,942,970

2016-2017 Fiscal Year State Courts System Appropriations



State Courts System Total: \$521,715,884

This total includes those issues that were funded in the General Appropriations Act, HB 5001, less vetoes. [Note: this figure includes \$20.4 million for pass through/ legislative project funding, i.e., worthy projects, but unrelated to the courts' core mission and not requested by the courts; \$19.2 million in nonrecurring funds; and \$2.8 million for legislatively-approved supplemental appropriations related to FY 2016-17 increased costs in employee-related benefits and expenses.]

Justice System Appropriations

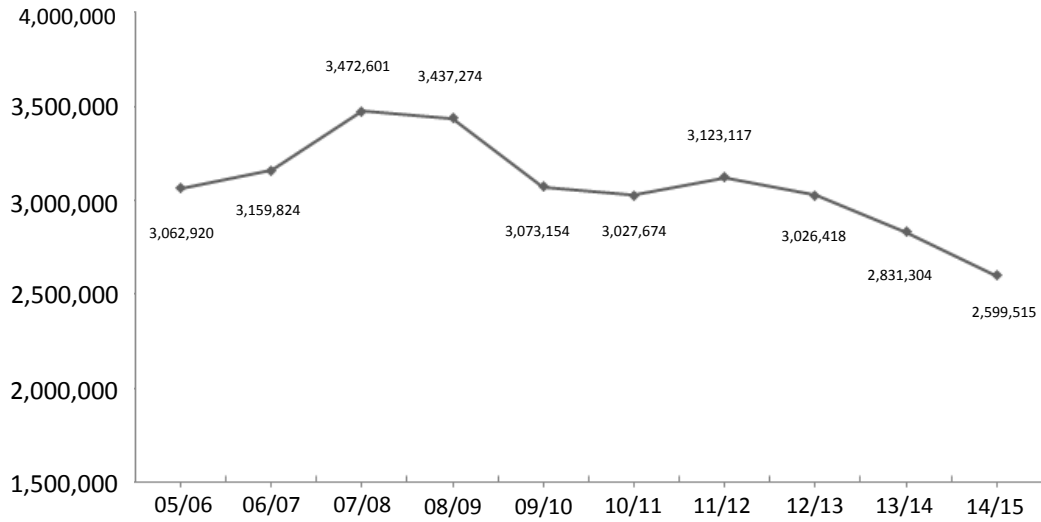
State Courts System	\$521,715,884
Justice Administration Executive Direction	\$107,881,933
Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program	\$46,389,876
State Attorneys	\$442,336,421
Public Defenders Judicial Circuit	\$222,920,323
Public Defenders Appellate	\$16,664,775
Capital Collateral Regional Counsel	\$10,366,861
Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsels	\$43,141,998
Total	\$1,411,418,071

FILINGS

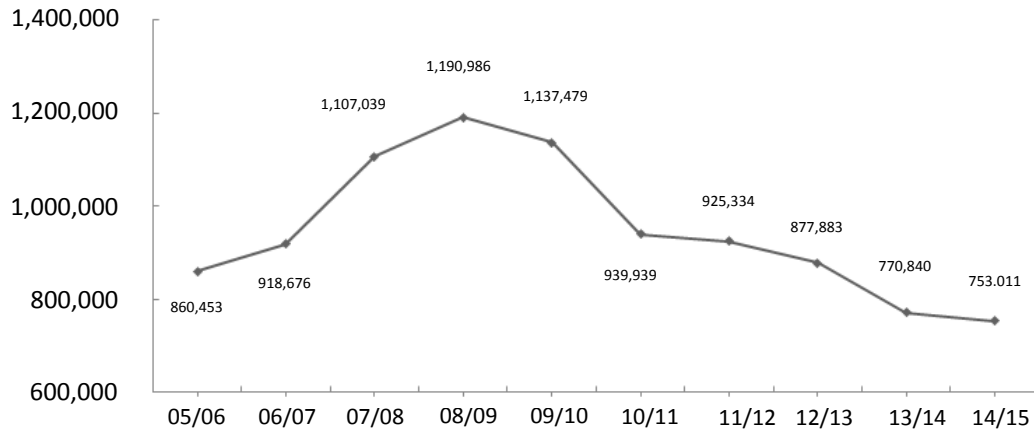
Filings, Florida's Trial Courts FY 2005-06 to FY 2014-15

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

County Courts



Circuit Courts

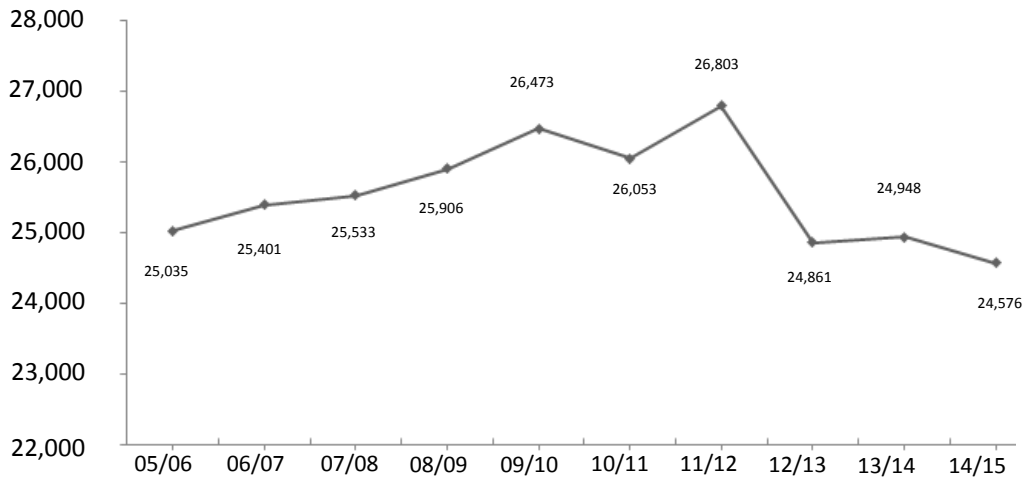


FILINGS

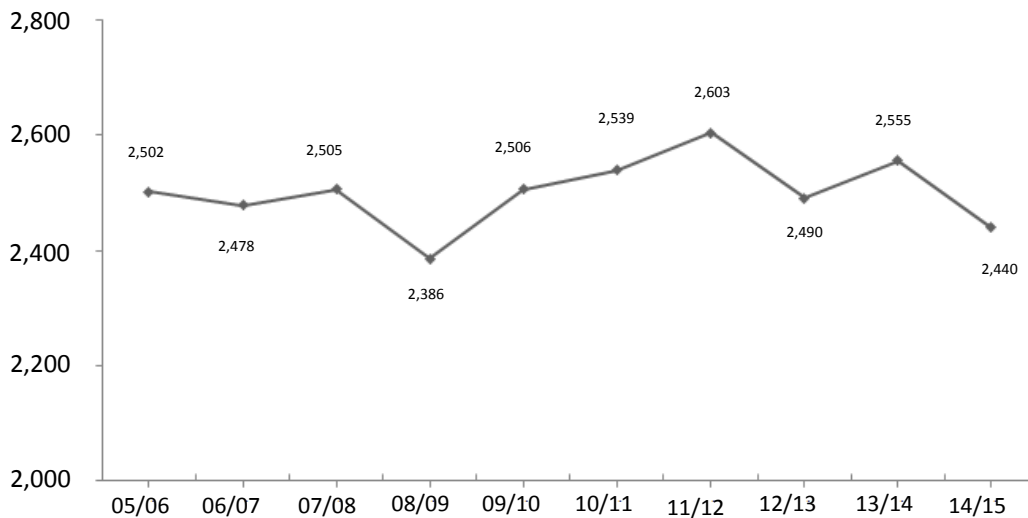
Filings, Florida's Appellate Courts FY 2005-06 to FY 2014-15

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

District Courts



Supreme Court



[For caseload statistics for the Florida Supreme Court's annual filings and dispositions for 2000 - 2015, please follow this link](#)

DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY

DCA FILINGS BY CASE CATEGORY, Notice of Appeal and Petition FY 2014 - 2015

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
All	Administrative	1,061
All	Civil	6,949
All	Criminal	8,885
All	Criminal Post Conviction*	4,797
All	Family	1,426
All	Juvenile	1,009
All	Probate/Guardianship	219
All	Workers' Compensation	230
Total		24,576

DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings	DCA	Case Category	Total Filings
1	Administrative	659	3	Administrative	73	5	Administrative	91
	Civil	1,362		Civil	1,236		Civil	1,069
	Criminal	2,407		Criminal	767		Criminal	1,886
	Criminal Post Conviction*	926		Criminal Post Conviction*	560		Criminal Post Conviction*	1,081
	Family	244		Family	207		Family	331
	Juvenile	162		Juvenile	166		Juvenile	155
	Probate/Guardianship	21		Probate/Guardianship	50		Probate/Guardianship	30
	Workers' Compensation	230						
		6,011			3,059			4,643
						Total		24,576
2	Administrative	115	4	Administrative	123			
	Civil	1,478		Civil	1,804			
	Criminal	2,259		Criminal	1,566			
	Criminal Post Conviction*	1,389		Criminal Post Conviction*	841			
	Family	268		Family	376			
	Juvenile	274		Juvenile	252			
	Probate/Guardianship	40		Probate/Guardianship	78			
		5,823			5,040			

* Criminal post conviction filings include notice of appeal only.

TRIAL COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT AND DIVISION, FY 2014 - 2015

Circuit	County	Division	Total Filings
All	All	Adult Criminal	171,414
All	All	Civil	181,222
All	All	Family Court*	284,629
All	All	Probate	115,746
All	All	County Adult Criminal	627,215
All	All	County Civil**	1,972,300
Total			3,352,526

* 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 2014 - 15

Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings	Circuit	Division	Total Filings
1	Adult Criminal	10,535	8	Adult Criminal	3,900	15	Adult Criminal	8,158
	Civil	5,523		Civil	2,418		Civil	14,402
	Family Court*	12,523		Family Court*	5,345		Family Court*	14,302
	Probate	5,059		Probate	2,942		Probate	8,080
	County Adult Criminal	23,392		County Adult Criminal	14,630		County Adult Criminal	37,740
	County Civil**	26,455		County Civil**	27,560		County Civil**	150,280
		83,487			56,795			232,962
2	Adult Criminal	4,584	9	Adult Criminal	14,209	16	Adult Criminal	1,193
	Civil	4,024		Civil	15,226		Civil	840
	Family Court*	5,960		Family Court*	25,596		Family Court*	1,614
	Probate	2,990		Probate	6,202		Probate	469
	County Adult Criminal	11,304		County Adult Criminal	48,791		County Adult Criminal	3,534
	County Civil**	20,191		County Civil**	129,936		County Civil**	10,924
		49,053			239,960			18,574
3	Adult Criminal	2,422	10	Adult Criminal	8,803	17	Adult Criminal	14,096
	Civil	1,763		Civil	5,548		Civil	22,519
	Family Court*	3,881		Family Court*	15,173		Family Court*	25,748
	Probate	1,086		Probate	5,066		Probate	9,134
	County Adult Criminal	5,923		County Adult Criminal	21,937		County Adult Criminal	43,995
	County Civil**	14,045		County Civil**	31,170		County Civil**	281,971
		29,120			87,697			397,463
4	Adult Criminal	9,037	11	Adult Criminal	14,694	18	Adult Criminal	8,360
	Civil	9,784		Civil	29,830		Civil	7,170
	Family Court*	18,493		Family Court*	35,473		Family Court*	13,133
	Probate	5,364		Probate	12,490		Probate	5,361
	County Adult Criminal	44,096		County Adult Criminal	90,936		County Adult Criminal	30,448
	County Civil**	125,015		County Civil**	671,279		County Civil**	65,464
		211,789			854,702			129,936
5	Adult Criminal	8,815	12	Adult Criminal	6,638	19	Adult Criminal	5,520
	Civil	8,297		Civil	5,243		Civil	5,472
	Family Court*	14,253		Family Court*	9,632		Family Court*	8,170
	Probate	7,527		Probate	6,695		Probate	4,192
	County Adult Criminal	21,246		County Adult Criminal	21,881		County Adult Criminal	19,574
	County Civil**	45,324		County Civil**	37,314		County Civil**	33,951
		105,462			87,403			76,879
6	Adult Criminal	15,659	13	Adult Criminal	12,886	20	Adult Criminal	8,365
	Civil	12,584		Civil	11,701		Civil	9,569
	Family Court*	19,991		Family Court*	21,459		Family Court*	15,274
	Probate	9,529		Probate	7,326		Probate	8,164
	County Adult Criminal	47,007		County Adult Criminal	50,775		County Adult Criminal	37,286
	County Civil**	65,301		County Civil**	102,768		County Civil**	54,611
		170,071			206,915			133,269
7	Adult Criminal	8,101	14	Adult Criminal	5,439	Total		3,352,526
	Civil	7,160		Civil	2,149			
	Family Court*	13,177		Family Court*	5,432			
	Probate	6,102		Probate	1,968			
	County Adult Criminal	38,035		County Adult Criminal	14,685			
	County Civil**	65,046		County Civil**	13,695			
		137,621			43,368			

* 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 2014 - 15

<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>	<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>	<u>Circuit & County</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Total Filings</u>
1 Escambia	Adult Criminal	5,580	2 Leon	Adult Criminal	3,082	3 Madison	Adult Criminal	254
	Civil	2,281		Civil	3,082		Civil	91
	Family Court*	5,861		Family Court*	4,069		Family Court*	344
	Probate	2,812		Probate	2,156		Probate	117
	County Adult Criminal	9,562		County Adult Criminal	7,948		County Adult Criminal	638
	County Civil**	10,983		County Civil**	14,383		County Civil**	2,663
		37,079			34,720			4,107
1 Okaloosa	Adult Criminal	2,520	2 Liberty	Adult Criminal	108	3 Suwannee	Adult Criminal	593
	Civil	1,450		Civil	42		Civil	299
	Family Court*	3,616		Family Court*	163		Family Court*	930
	Probate	1,215		Probate	40		Probate	229
	County Adult Criminal	6,802		County Adult Criminal	233		County Adult Criminal	1,061
	County Civil**	8,357		County Civil**	238		County Civil**	1,795
		23,960			824			4,907
1 Santa Rosa	Adult Criminal	1,661	2 Wakulla	Adult Criminal	330	3 Taylor	Adult Criminal	303
	Civil	1,148		Civil	264		Civil	215
	Family Court*	2,138		Family Court*	511		Family Court*	421
	Probate	715		Probate	149		Probate	102
	County Adult Criminal	4,312		County Adult Criminal	713		County Adult Criminal	857
	County Civil**	5,402		County Civil**	1,120		County Civil**	990
		15,376			3,087			2,888
1 Walton	Adult Criminal	774	3 Columbia	Adult Criminal	885	4 Clay	Adult Criminal	1,555
	Civil	644		Civil	539		Civil	1,308
	Family Court*	908		Family Court*	1,330		Family Court*	2,850
	Probate	317		Probate	425		Probate	592
	County Adult Criminal	2,716		County Adult Criminal	2,318		County Adult Criminal	3,937
	County Civil**	1,713		County Civil**	4,054		County Civil**	11,411
		7,072			9,551			21,653
2 Franklin	Adult Criminal	269	3 Dixie	Adult Criminal	158	4 Duval	Adult Criminal	6,849
	Civil	144		Civil	72		Civil	7,990
	Family Court*	297		Family Court*	368		Family Court*	14,403
	Probate	105		Probate	94		Probate	4,473
	County Adult Criminal	758		County Adult Criminal	384		County Adult Criminal	37,423
	County Civil**	385		County Civil**	811		County Civil**	110,700
		1,958			1,887			181,838
2 Gadsden	Adult Criminal	584	3 Hamilton	Adult Criminal	174	4 Nassau	Adult Criminal	633
	Civil	394		Civil	490		Civil	486
	Family Court*	722		Family Court*	365		Family Court*	1,240
	Probate	477		Probate	73		Probate	299
	County Adult Criminal	1,163		County Adult Criminal	532		County Adult Criminal	2,736
	County Civil**	2,897		County Civil**	3,419		County Civil**	2,904
		6,237			5,053			8,298
2 Jefferson	Adult Criminal	211	3 Lafayette	Adult Criminal	55	5 Citrus	Adult Criminal	1,027
	Civil	98		Civil	57		Civil	1,094
	Family Court*	198		Family Court*	123		Family Court*	1,836
	Probate	63		Probate	46		Probate	880
	County Adult Criminal	489		County Adult Criminal	133		County Adult Criminal	1,965
	County Civil**	1,168		County Civil**	313		County Civil**	3,193
		2,227			727			9,995

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

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COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
5 Hernando	Adult Criminal	1,709	7 St. Johns	Adult Criminal	1,256	9 Orange	Adult Criminal	10,915
	Civil	1,617		Civil	1,605		Civil	12,012
	Family Court*	2,806		Family Court*	2,452		Family Court*	20,536
	Probate	2,008		Probate	945		Probate	4,982
	County Adult Criminal	3,574		County Adult Criminal	5,191		County Adult Criminal	39,868
	County Civil**	10,894		County Civil**	10,942		County Civil**	107,454
	22,608		22,391		195,767			
5 Lake	Adult Criminal	2,289	7 Volusia	Adult Criminal	5,335	9 Osceola	Adult Criminal	3,294
	Civil	2,335		Civil	4,231		Civil	3,214
	Family Court*	3,619		Family Court*	8,133		Family Court*	5,060
	Probate	1,800		Probate	4,236		Probate	1,220
	County Adult Criminal	6,125		County Adult Criminal	26,260		County Adult Criminal	8,923
	County Civil**	16,420		County Civil**	49,005		County Civil**	22,482
	32,588		97,200		44,193			
5 Marion	Adult Criminal	3,066	8 Alachua	Adult Criminal	2,156	10 Hardee	Adult Criminal	394
	Civil	2,737		Civil	1,509		Civil	137
	Family Court*	5,333		Family Court*	3,234		Family Court*	428
	Probate	2,407		Probate	2,231		Probate	133
	County Adult Criminal	7,889		County Adult Criminal	10,151		County Adult Criminal	1,272
	County Civil**	11,414		County Civil**	21,465		County Civil**	1,276
	32,846		40,746		3,640			
5 Sumter	Adult Criminal	724	8 Baker	Adult Criminal	396	10 Highlands	Adult Criminal	883
	Civil	514		Civil	147		Civil	652
	Family Court*	659		Family Court*	407		Family Court*	1,311
	Probate	432		Probate	178		Probate	942
	County Adult Criminal	1,693		County Adult Criminal	1,164		County Adult Criminal	2,017
	County Civil**	3,403		County Civil**	1,377		County Civil**	3,417
	7,425		3,669		9,222			
6 Pasco	Adult Criminal	3,918	8 Bradford	Adult Criminal	545	10 Polk	Adult Criminal	7,526
	Civil	4,220		Civil	253		Civil	4,759
	Family Court*	6,677		Family Court*	469		Family Court*	13,434
	Probate	2,942		Probate	115		Probate	3,991
	County Adult Criminal	10,518		County Adult Criminal	1,363		County Adult Criminal	18,648
	County Civil**	21,509		County Civil**	2,238		County Civil**	26,477
	49,784		4,983		74,835			
6 Pinellas	Adult Criminal	11,741	8 Gilchrist	Adult Criminal	225	11 Miami-Dade	Adult Criminal	14,694
	Civil	8,364		Civil	104		Civil	29,830
	Family Court*	13,314		Family Court*	341		Family Court*	35,473
	Probate	6,587		Probate	69		Probate	12,490
	County Adult Criminal	36,489		County Adult Criminal	447		County Adult Criminal	90,936
	County Civil**	43,792		County Civil**	433		County Civil**	671,279
	120,287		1,619		854,702			
7 Flagler	Adult Criminal	562	8 Levy	Adult Criminal	419	12 Desoto	Adult Criminal	501
	Civil	799		Civil	291		Civil	155
	Family Court*	1,228		Family Court*	735		Family Court*	698
	Probate	554		Probate	223		Probate	155
	County Adult Criminal	3,654		County Adult Criminal	1,252		County Adult Criminal	1,046
	County Civil**	1,657		County Civil**	1,626		County Civil**	1,653
	8,454		4,546		4,208			
7 Putnam	Adult Criminal	948	8 Union	Adult Criminal	159	12 Manatee	Adult Criminal	2,886
	Civil	525		Civil	114		Civil	2,262
	Family Court*	1,364		Family Court*	159		Family Court*	4,851
	Probate	367		Probate	126		Probate	1,900
	County Adult Criminal	2,930		County Adult Criminal	253		County Adult Criminal	9,667
	County Civil**	3,442		County Civil**	421		County Civil**	12,310
	9,576		1,232		33,876			

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

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COURT FILINGS BY CIRCUIT, COUNTY, & DIVISION

Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings	Circuit & County	Division	Total Filings
12 Sarasota	Adult Criminal	3,251	15 Palm Beach	Adult Criminal	8,158	19 Okeechobee	Adult Criminal	598
	Civil	2,826		Civil	14,402		Civil	487
	Family Court*	4,083		Family Court*	14,302		Family Court*	784
	Probate	4,640		Probate	8,080		Probate	156
	County Adult Criminal	11,168		County Adult Criminal	37,740		County Adult Criminal	1,425
	County Civil**	23,351		County Civil**	150,280		County Civil**	1,504
	49,319		232,962		4,954			
13 Hillsborough	Adult Criminal	12,886	16 Monroe	Adult Criminal	1,193	19 St. Lucie	Adult Criminal	2,488
	Civil	11,701		Civil	840		Civil	2,344
	Family Court*	21,459		Family Court*	1,614		Family Court*	3,688
	Probate	7,326		Probate	469		Probate	2,081
	County Adult Criminal	50,775		County Adult Criminal	3,534		County Adult Criminal	9,025
	County Civil**	102,768		County Civil**	10,924		County Civil**	15,059
	206,915		18,574		34,685			
14 Bay	Adult Criminal	3,586	17 Broward	Adult Criminal	14,096	20 Charlotte	Adult Criminal	1,712
	Civil	1,417		Civil	22,519		Civil	1,922
	Family Court*	3,173		Family Court*	25,748		Family Court*	2,821
	Probate	1,239		Probate	9,134		Probate	1,953
	County Adult Criminal	12,009		County Adult Criminal	43,995		County Adult Criminal	5,075
	County Civil**	8,413		County Civil**	281,971		County Civil**	5,350
	29,837		397,463		18,833			
14 Calhoun	Adult Criminal	234	18 Brevard	Adult Criminal	5,444	20 Collier	Adult Criminal	1,563
	Civil	86		Civil	4,033		Civil	2,441
	Family Court*	305		Family Court*	7,998		Family Court*	3,146
	Probate	78		Probate	3,161		Probate	2,166
	County Adult Criminal	242		County Adult Criminal	17,174		County Adult Criminal	8,391
	County Civil**	698		County Civil**	22,852		County Civil**	14,115
	1,643		60,662		31,822			
14 Gulf	Adult Criminal	288	18 Seminole	Adult Criminal	2,916	20 Glades	Adult Criminal	100
	Civil	122		Civil	3,137		Civil	40
	Family Court*	194		Family Court*	5,135		Family Court*	115
	Probate	98		Probate	2,200		Probate	50
	County Adult Criminal	414		County Adult Criminal	13,274		County Adult Criminal	438
	County Civil**	302		County Civil**	42,612		County Civil**	1,502
	1,418		69,274		2,245			
14 Holmes	Adult Criminal	419	19 Indian River	Adult Criminal	1,288	20 Hendry	Adult Criminal	488
	Civil	93		Civil	1,152		Civil	201
	Family Court*	354		Family Court*	1,711		Family Court*	590
	Probate	127		Probate	1,068		Probate	110
	County Adult Criminal	551		County Adult Criminal	3,474		County Adult Criminal	2,448
	County Civil**	741		County Civil**	5,932		County Civil**	2,343
	2,285		14,625		6,180			
14 Jackson	Adult Criminal	565	19 Martin	Adult Criminal	1,146	20 Lee	Adult Criminal	4,502
	Civil	299		Civil	1,489		Civil	4,965
	Family Court*	1,005		Family Court*	1,987		Family Court*	8,602
	Probate	327		Probate	887		Probate	3,885
	County Adult Criminal	1,071		County Adult Criminal	5,650		County Adult Criminal	20,934
	County Civil**	2,716		County Civil**	11,456		County Civil**	31,301
	5,983		22,615		74,189			
14 Washington	Adult Criminal	347						
	Civil	132						
	Family Court*	401						
	Probate	99						
	County Adult Criminal	398						
	County Civil**	825						
	2,202							

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

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COURT CONTACTS FOR 2016 – 2017

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT

Chief Justice JORGE LABARGA (850) 413-8371
Clerk John A. Tomasino (850) 922-5468
Marshal Silvester Dawson (850) 922-6204
State Courts Administrator PK Jameson (850) 922-5081
Website <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org>

DISTRICT COURTS OF APPEAL

1st DCA

Chief Judge L. CLAYTON ROBERTS (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 CRAIG C. VILLANTI (813) 272-8616
Clerk Mary Beth Kuenzel (863) 940-6060
Marshal Jo Haynes (863) 940-6040
Website <http://www.2dca.org>

3rd DCA

Chief Judge RICHARD J. SUAREZ (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 CORY J. CIKLIN (561) 242-2063
Clerk Lonn Weissblum (561) 242-2000
Marshal Daniel DiGiacomo (561) 242-2000
Website <http://www.4dca.org>

5th DCA

Chief Judge JAY P. COHEN (386) 947-1570
Clerk Joanne P. Simmons (386) 947-1557
Marshal Charles Crawford (386) 947-1544
Website <http://www.5dca.org>

CIRCUIT COURTS

1st Judicial Circuit

Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties
Chief Judge LINDA L. NOBLES (850) 595-4459
Court Administrator Robin Wright (850) 595-4400
Website <http://www.firstjudicialcircuit.org>

2nd Judicial Circuit

Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla counties
Chief Judge JONATHAN SJOSTROM (850) 606-4321
Court Administrator Grant Slayden (850) 606-4422
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 MARK MAHON (904) 255-1230
Court Administrator Joseph G. Stelma, Jr. (904) 255-1155
Website <http://www.jud4.org/>

5th Judicial Circuit

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

6th Judicial Circuit

Pasco and Pinellas counties
Chief Judge ANTHONY RONDOLINO (727) 582-7272
Court Administrator Gay Inskeep (727) 582-7511
Website <http://www.jud6.org>

7th Judicial Circuit

Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, and Volusia counties
Chief Judge TERENCE R. PERKINS (386) 239-7792
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 TOBY S. MONACO (352) 374-3641
Court Administrator Paul Silverman (352) 374-3638
Website <http://www.circuit8.org>

9th Judicial Circuit

Orange and Osceola counties
Chief Judge FREDERICK J. LAUTEN (407) 836-2009
Court Administrator Matthew Benefiel (407) 836-2051
Website <http://www.ninthcircuit.org/>

10th Judicial Circuit

Hardee, Highlands, and Polk counties
Chief Judge DONALD G. JACOBSEN (863) 534-4649
Court Administrator Nick Sudzina (863) 534-4686
Website <http://www.jud10.flcourts.org/>

11th Judicial Circuit

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

12th Judicial Circuit

DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties
Chief Judge CHARLES E. WILLIAMS (941) 861-7942
Court Administrator Walt Smith (941) 861-7800
Website <http://www.jud12.flcourts.org/>

13th Judicial Circuit

Hillsborough County
Chief Judge RONALD N. FICARROTTA (813) 272-6797
Court Administrator Gina Justice (813) 272-5367
Website <http://www.fljud13.org/>

COURT CONTACTS FOR 2016 – 2017

14th Judicial Circuit

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

Chief Judge ELIJAH SMILEY (850) 767-3341

Court Administrator Robyn Hatcher Gable (850) 747-5370

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 MARK H. JONES (305) 292-3422

Court Administrator Holly Elomina (305) 295-3644

Website <http://www.keyscourts.net>

17th Judicial Circuit

Broward County

Chief Judge PETER M. WEINSTEIN (954) 831-5506

Court Administrator Kathleen R. Pugh (954) 831-7741

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

18th Judicial Circuit

Brevard and Seminole counties

Chief Judge JOHN D. GALLUZZO (407) 665-4299

Court Administrator Mark Van Bever (321) 633-2171

Website <http://www.flcourts18.org>

19th Judicial Circuit

Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties

Chief Judge ELIZABETH A. METZGER (772) 288-5560

Court Administrator Tom Genung (772) 807-4370

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

20th Judicial Circuit

Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties

Chief Judge MICHAEL T. McHUGH (239) 533-2775

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

Website <http://www.ca.cjis20.org/home/main/homepage.asp>

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