

Justice: Fair and Accessible to All

**The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch
2016 - 2021**

Mission

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.

Purpose

All people are united by a desire for justice. Our courts are the primary formal institution we have created to meet this desire. The challenge of providing justice has always been great, and as we move forward, the challenge becomes even greater. Over the past decade, Florida's judicial branch, like court systems across the nation, has been touched by sweeping new challenges and pressures. It has felt the effects of the changing environment and the increasing tensions attributable to accommodating change while also retaining the traditional purposes, responsibilities, and fundamental values of the courts.

The purpose of this long-range strategic plan is to guide Florida's judicial branch as it seeks to advance its mission and vision in the coming years. The plan, organized around five broad issue areas, is designed to assist the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice as they provide leadership and direction to the branch. Long-range planning is required by Rule of Judicial Administration 2.225. While the issues and goals are numbered for convenience, there is no particular priority to these important elements listed within the plan.

Common Terms

State Courts refers to the courts created by Article V of the Constitution of the State of Florida, specifically the supreme court, district courts of appeal, circuit courts, and county courts.

State Courts System or Court System refers solely to the officers, employees, and divisions of the supreme court, district courts of appeal, circuit courts, and county courts. The State Courts System does not include entities such as circuit clerks of court, state attorneys, public defenders, or The Florida Bar.

Judicial Branch refers to the state courts and the framework of court rules, regulatory oversight, and leadership of the legal profession provided within the domain of the Florida Supreme Court and the Chief Justice. The judicial branch includes the circuit clerks of court when performing court-related functions.

Justice System or Justice System Partners refers to the network of entities that routinely work in conjunction with the state courts. Justice system partners include The Florida Bar and providers of legal services, law enforcement agencies, governmental and private service agencies such as the Department of Children and Families, the Florida's Office of Guardian ad Litem, treatment providers, and community-based agencies.

Court Employees refers to non-judge personnel of the State Courts System as well as personnel in county-funded positions managed by court administration.

Judges refers to judges of the county, circuit, and district courts of appeal as well as the justices of the supreme court. Magistrates, hearing officers, and special masters are not judges.

Court Personnel refers to court employees as well as other personnel who are not court employees but who work in or provide services to the courts. These may include, but are not limited to (depending on the jurisdiction), bailiffs, clerk staff, contracted court reporters, and contracted foreign language interpreters.

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.

Goals:

- 1.1 Perform judicial duties and administer justice without bias or prejudice.
- 1.2 Ensure the fair and timely resolution of all cases through effective case management.
- 1.3 Utilize caseload and other workload information to manage resources and promote accountability.
- 1.4 Obtain appropriate and stable levels of funding and resources for courts throughout the state.
- 1.5 Encourage the use of consistent practices, procedures, and forms statewide.
- 1.6 Increase the use of constructive and non-adversarial resolutions in family law cases.

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.

Goals:

- 2.1 Minimize economic barriers to court access and services.
- 2.2 Provide useful information about court procedures, available services, forms, and other resources.
- 2.3 Ensure that court procedures and operations are easily understandable and user-friendly.
- 2.4 Collaborate with justice system partners and community organizations to deliver appropriate services.
- 2.5 Reduce communication and language barriers to facilitate participation in court proceedings.
- 2.6 Promote the use of innovative and effective problem-solving courts and alternative dispute resolution processes.

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.

Goals:

- 3.1 Enhance understanding of the purposes, roles, and responsibilities of the judicial branch through education and outreach.
- 3.2 Promote public trust and confidence in the judicial branch by delivering timely, consistent, and useful information through traditional and innovative communication methods.
- 3.3 Communicate effectively with all branches and levels of government on justice system issues.
- 3.4 Coordinate with justice system partners to share information and promote services which further the interests of court users.

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.

Goals:

- 4.1 Protect all judges, court personnel, court users, and facilities through effective security, emergency preparedness, and continuity of operations plans.
- 4.2 Safeguard the security, integrity, and confidentiality of court data and technology systems.
- 4.3 Create a compatible technology infrastructure to improve case management and meet the needs of the judicial branch and court users.
- 4.4 Improve data exchange and integration processes with the clerks of court and other justice system partners.
- 4.5 Modernize court processes through automation and expanded self-service options for court users.
- 4.6 Secure sufficient financial resources for technology and innovation to meet current needs and future challenges.
- 4.7 Strengthen and support judicial branch governance and policy development.

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.

Goals:

- 5.1 Promote public trust and confidence by maintaining high standards of professionalism and ethical behavior.
- 5.2 Attract, hire, and retain a qualified, ethical, and diverse workforce.
- 5.3 Provide timely education and training to judges and court employees to ensure high-level performance.
- 5.4 Expand the education of judges and court employees to recognize and understand various perspectives of court users on relevant and emerging topics.
- 5.5 Develop technology-based approaches to complement existing education programs for judges and court employees.
- 5.6 Ensure judges and court employees have the technological skills necessary to perform more efficiently.

SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

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