

Why courts are vitally important  
to *everyone* in Florida

Our courts **protect democracy** by upholding the law, protecting individual rights and liberties, enforcing public order, and providing for a peaceful resolution of disputes. More than 4 million new cases are filed each year impacting every aspect of society.

Our courts **safeguard victims' rights, determine guilt or innocence of the accused, and impose appropriate punishment.** Crime hurts everyone. It results in physical and emotional injury, loss of life, lost wages, higher insurance premiums, higher business expenses, and degradation of quality of life within our communities. Last year, more than 1.3 million criminal cases were filed. Everyone in our state is affected.

Our courts **resolve personal, business, and property disputes.** The business community is a major user of the justice system. Last year there were more than 2.2 million civil cases filed.

Our courts **protect families, children, the elderly and the infirm.** Nearly 462,000 cases are filed each year involving the young, the old, and the frail.

Florida trial courts:  
***Busy, Efficient, and a Bargain***

Florida trial courts **decided more than 3.5 million cases** last year (FY 06-07). More than 4 million new cases came in the front door. Serious criminal cases have climbed 26 percent in five years. Divorce cases were up 9 percent in FY 05-06 from the year before and dependency cases were up 6 percent. And mortgage foreclosures nearly doubled last year.

Florida has **fewer judges, on a per capita basis, than many other large states.** Florida has five judges per 100,000 population. Georgia and Texas have twice as many – 10 per 100,000 population. New Jersey has nine and Pennsylvania has eight. The national average is seven judges per 100,000.

**Less than 1 penny of every dollar in the state budget goes to pay for the courts.** In the last three years, the Legislature has approved 114 new judgeships. But they were desperately needed – and the courts' share of the total budget has remained below 1 percent.

In a large, modern, complex court system,  
judges *can't* do it alone

Judges must be able to delegate administrative responsibilities to full-time professionals. This allows cases to be resolved more quickly and **saves tax dollars** since such staff are more affordable than judges.

Court administrators ensure a safe, secure, healthy, and dignified environment for hearings and trials. They oversee a rigorous system that **analyzes and reports statistics on workload and performance,** data needed to hold the branch accountable. A few other critical responsibilities: **jury oversight, ADA** planning and management, **technology** planning and support, **disaster and security preparation and response,** personnel and payroll, finance and accounting, purchasing, property and records administration.

Court administrators are **essential to judicial independence.** If the judiciary did not have the ability to manage its internal operations it would hardly be a co-equal branch of government.

**“The administration of justice is the firmest pillar of government.”**

George Washington

## Essential Support for an Efficient Judiciary

**Judicial Assistants** handle office administrative tasks but also schedule hearings and talk to litigants who have questions about their cases. Since judges must avoid ex parte communications, such assistance is essential.

**Staff Attorneys** help judges research, digest, analyze and answer questions of law more quickly.

**Magistrates** hold hearings and evaluate evidence in certain aspects of some cases, making rulings on pre-trial and post-judgment issues. They also make findings of fact and provide judges with recommendations on some legal issues.

**Hearing Officers**, like magistrates, hold hearings and evaluate evidence. They work in child support enforcement, helping people get payments and resolving related disputes.

**Case Managers** oversee the progress of cases in family court, from intake to referral. Duties include screening, evaluating, monitoring, tracking, coordinating and scheduling events.

**Mediators** provide efficient and cost-effective options to litigation. They also open the door for people to work out settlements by consensus rather than through a traditional adversarial setting.

## Necessary to Guarantee Due Process

**Court Reporters** create a verbatim record of words spoken in court, providing the necessary transcriptions for appellate review.

**Court Interpreters** ensure due process and constitutional rights of access to courts and equal protection by eliminating communication barriers based on disability or limited ability to understand English.

**Court-Appointed Expert Witnesses** provide independent opinions about scientific or technical matters in dispute and on the physical, psychological or mental condition of people before the court to decide whether they can live on their own or are competent to be brought to trial.

### Court employees manage still other valuable services:

Custody evaluation, guardianship monitoring, drug treatment/testing, delinquency diversion, child advocacy centers, supervised visitation programs ,,,

# The Judicial Branch of Government



Justice  
for all  
Floridians

still as important ...  
today and tomorrow