



**YOUR COURTS  
UP CLOSE  
2017**

Chief Judge Elizabeth A. Metzger

Circuit Court Judge

19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit

February 21, 2017

# Florida Courts

- Article V of the Constitution of Florida addresses the Judicial Branch
  - Supreme Court
  - Five District Courts of Appeal
  - Twenty Circuit Courts
  - Sixty-seven County Courts
- Each layer of the Florida judicial system has a distinct role in providing justice to all Floridians

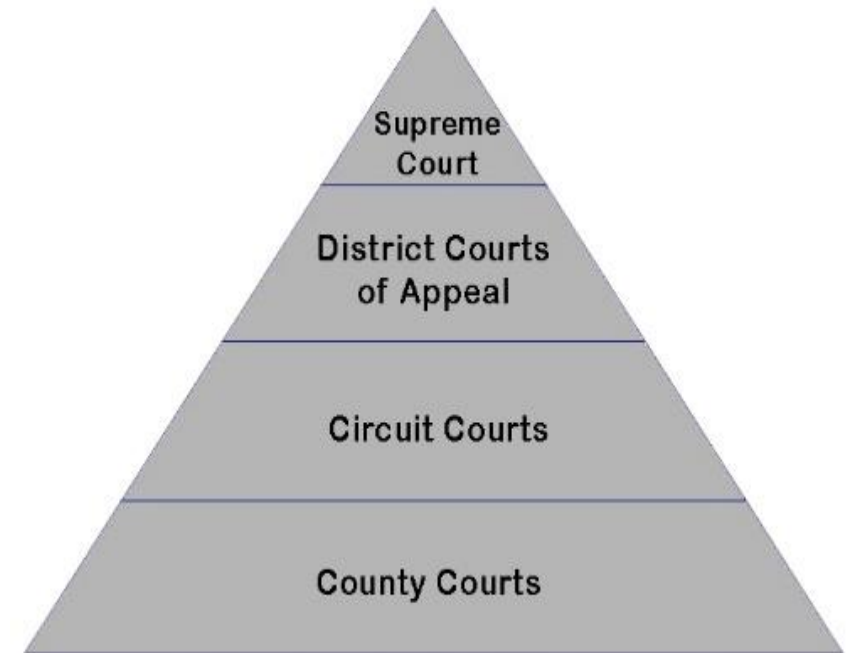
# Court System Organization and Structure

- **Appellate Courts:**

- **Supreme Court** – the highest appellate court in Florida

- **District Courts of Appeal**

- There are five District Courts of Appeal in Florida, located respectively in Tallahassee, Lakeland, Miami, West Palm Beach and Daytona Beach. As a general rule, decisions of the district courts of appeal represent the final appellate review of litigated cases.



# Court System Organization and Structure

- **Trial Courts:**
  - **Trial Courts – Circuit**
    - There are 20 judicial circuits in the Florida court system. Circuit courts have general trial jurisdiction over matters not assigned by statute to the county courts and also hear appeals from county court cases. Some circuits are made up of multiple counties.
  - **Trial Courts – County**
    - The Florida Constitution establishes that there is **ONE** county court in each of Florida’s 67 counties. The county courts are sometimes referred to as “the people’s courts,” probably because a large part of the courts’ work involves voluminous citizen disputes, such as traffic offenses, less serious criminal matters (misdemeanors), and relatively small monetary disputes.

# Trial Courts - Circuit

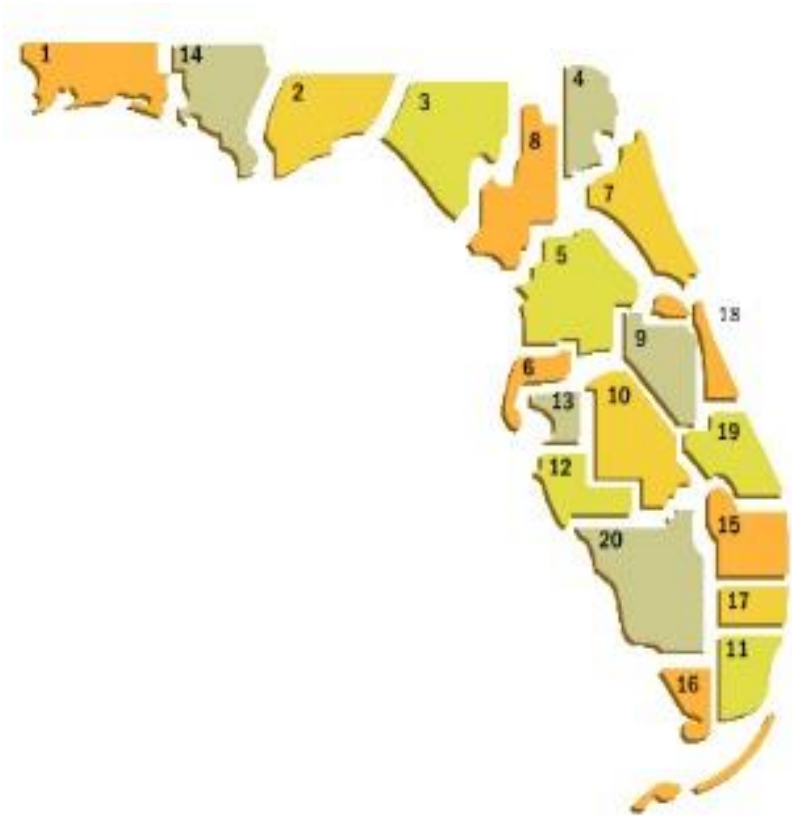
## Organization

The Constitution provides that a circuit court shall be established to serve each judicial circuit established by the Legislature, of which there are **twenty**. Within each circuit, there may be any number of judges, depending upon the population and caseload of the particular area.

To be eligible for the office of circuit judge, a person must be an elector of a county within the circuit and must have been admitted to the practice of law in the state for the preceding five years.

Circuit court judges are elected by the voters of the circuits in nonpartisan, contested elections against other persons who choose to qualify as candidates for the position. Circuit court judges serve for six-year terms, and they are subject to the same disciplinary standards and procedures as Supreme Court Justices and district court judges.

A chief judge is chosen from among the circuit judges and county judges in each judicial circuit to carry out administrative responsibilities for all trial courts (both circuit and county courts) within the circuit.



# Trial Courts - Circuit

## **Jurisdiction**

Circuit courts have general trial jurisdiction over matters not assigned by statute to the county courts and also hear appeals from county court cases. Thus, circuit courts are simultaneously the highest trial courts and the lowest appellate courts in Florida's judicial system.

The trial jurisdiction of circuit courts includes, among other matters, original jurisdiction over civil disputes involving more than \$15,000; controversies involving the estates of decedents, minors, and persons adjudicated as incapacitated; cases relating to juveniles; criminal prosecutions for all felonies; tax disputes; actions to determine the title and boundaries of real property; suits for declaratory judgments that is, to determine the legal rights or responsibilities of parties under the terms of written instruments, laws, or regulations before a dispute arises and leads to litigation; and requests for injunctions to prevent persons or entities from acting in a manner that is asserted to be unlawful.

Lastly, circuit courts are also granted the power to issue the extraordinary writs of certiorari, prohibition, mandamus, quo warranto, and habeas corpus, and all other writs necessary to the complete exercise of their jurisdiction.

# Trial Courts - County

## Organization

The Constitution establishes a county court in each of Florida's 67 counties. The number of judges in each county court varies with the population and caseload of the county. To be eligible for the office of county judge, a person must be an elector of the county and must have been a member of The Florida Bar for five years; in counties with a population of 40,000 or less, a person must only be a member of The Florida Bar.

County judges are eligible for assignment to circuit court, and they are frequently assigned as such within the judicial circuit that embraces their counties.

County judges serve six-year terms, and they are subject to the same disciplinary standards, and to the jurisdiction of the Judicial Qualifications Commission, as all other judicial officers.

# Trial Courts - County

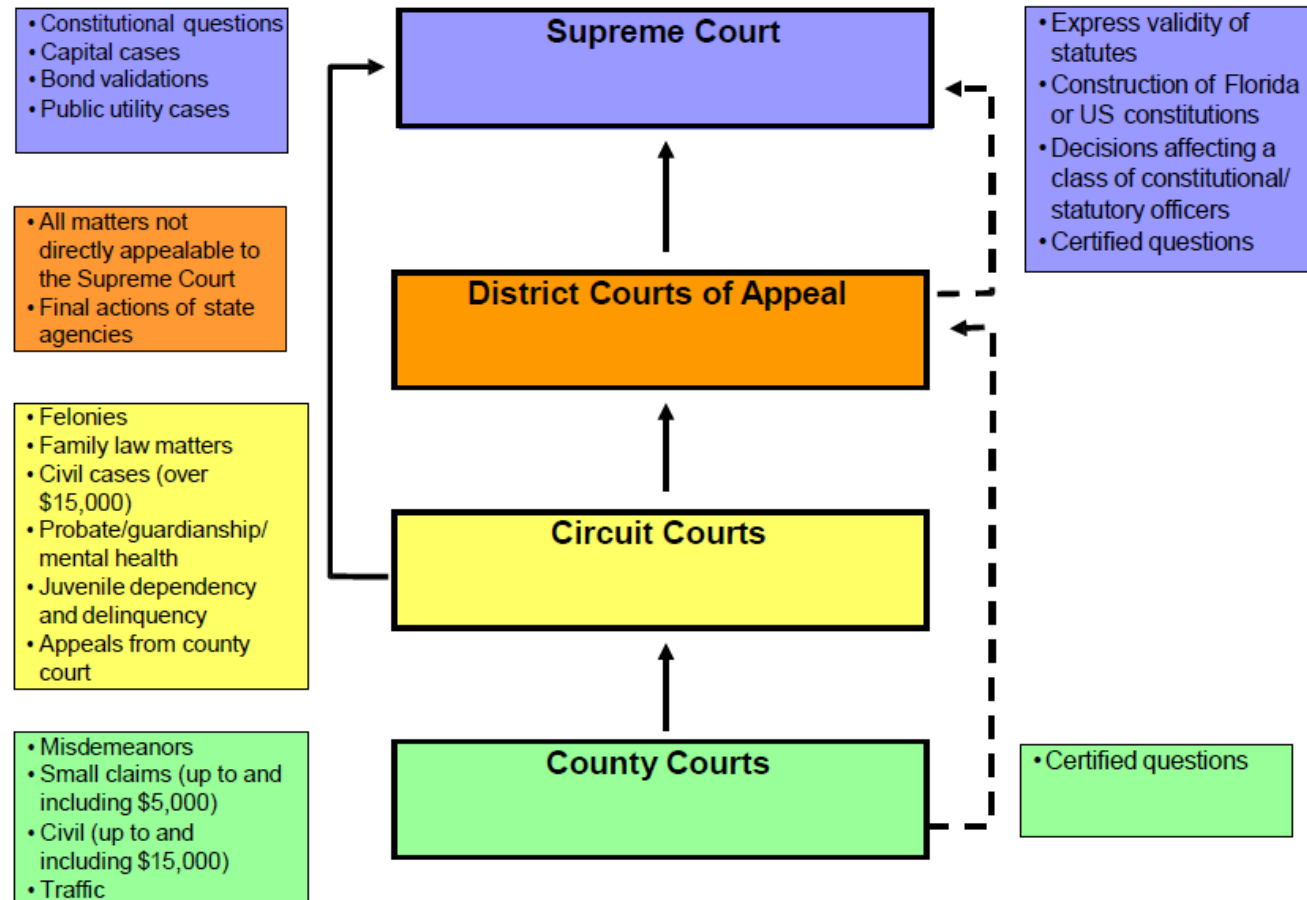
## **Jurisdiction**

The trial jurisdiction of county courts is established by statute. The jurisdiction of county courts extends to civil disputes involving \$15,000 or less.

The majority of non-jury trials in Florida take place before one judge sitting as a judge of the county court. The county courts are sometimes referred to as "the people's courts," probably because a large part of the courts' work involves voluminous citizen disputes, such as traffic offenses, less serious criminal matters (misdemeanors), and relatively small monetary disputes.



# Florida Courts - Jurisdiction



# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **Circuit Judges:**

**Honorable Elizabeth A. Metzger, Chief Judge:** Specialty courts throughout the circuit (Mental Health Court, Drug Court, Veteran's Court), assist with felony, family, civil and juvenile throughout the circuit

## **Indian River County:**

**Honorable Cynthia L. Cox, Administrative Mental Health Court Judge:** Felony, Mental Health Court/Veteran's Court

**Honorable Victoria L. Griffin:** Dependency, Delinquency, Probate, Guardianship, Adult Drug Court, Delinquency and Dependency Drug Court, Assist with Mental Health Court, CINS/FINS, Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Member - IRC Children's Services Council

**Honorable Paul B. Kanarek:** Civil

**Honorable Robert L. Pegg:** Domestic relations

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **Martin County:**

**Honorable Barbara W. Bronis:** Dependency, Delinquency, Civil non-jury, Jimmy Ryce, Probate, Guardianship, Substance Abuse and Mental Health

**Honorable Steven J. Levin:** Felony Drug Court

**Honorable Michael J. McNicholas:** Domestic relations, Member - MC Children's Services Council

**Honorable Lawrence Mirman, Administrative Appellate Judge:** Felony

**Honorable William L. Roby:** Civil Jury Trial and Mortgage Foreclosure

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **Okeechobee County:**

**Honorable Laurie E. Buchanan:** Civil, Probate, Guardianship, assist with Felony, Dependency, assist with St. Lucie County Residential Foreclosure

**Honorable Dan L. Vaughn:** Domestic relations, Felony, Substance Abuse and Mental Health, assist with St. Lucie County Residential Foreclosure

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **St. Lucie County:**

**Honorable Sherwood Bauer, Jr:** 50% Domestic relations, assist with Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency

**Honorable Robert E. Belanger, Administrative Veteran's Court Judge:** Non-Jury Civil including Residential Mortgage Foreclosure, First Appearances in rotation, Veteran's Court

**Honorable Cynthia L. Cox:** Assist with Mental Health Court

**Honorable Janet C. Croom, Administrative Civil Judge:** Civil Jury Trials, Probate, Guardianship, Substance Abuse and Mental Health

**Honorable Michael C. Heisey:** Dependency, Delinquency, assist with Domestic relations, Member - St. Lucie County Children's Services Council

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **St. Lucie County Continued:**

**Honorable Steven J. Levin, Administrative Drug Court Judge:** Felony, Adult Drug Court, Juvenile Drug court

**Honorable James W. McCann:** Felony

**Honorable Charles A. Schwab, Administrative Unified Family Court Judge:** 50% Domestic relations, assist with Juvenile Dependency and Delinquency

**Honorable Gary L. Sweet, Administrative Criminal Judge:** Felony

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **County Judges:**

### **Indian River County:**

**Honorable David C. Morgan:** 50% Indian River County Court Cases

**Honorable Joe A. Wild:** 50% Indian River County Court Cases

### **Martin County:**

**Honorable Curtis L. Disque:** 1/3 Martin County Cases, assist with Felony, assist with Delinquency, Juvenile Drug Court, Supervise Civil Traffic Infraction Hearing Officers

**Honorable Kathleen H. Roberts:** 1/3 Martin County Court Cases

**Honorable Darren Steele:** 1/3 Martin County Court Cases

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judges

## **Okeechobee County:**

**Honorable Jerald D. Bryant:** County Court Cases, Delinquency, Truancy, Adult Felony and Misdemeanor Drug Court, Juvenile Drug Court, Member - OC Children's Services Council

## **St. Lucie County:**

**Honorable Edmond W. Alonzo:** County Court Civil and Landlord/Tenant, Traffic infractions involving serious injury or death, Traffic Hearing Officer recusals/disqualifications, 30% Small Claims including Replevin

**Honorable Daryl Isenhower:** 20% County Criminal Cases, 70% Small Claims including Replevin, Collections Court

**Honorable Kathryn Nelson:** 40% County Criminal Cases, Misdemeanor Drug Court

**Honorable Philip J. Yacucci:** 40% County Criminal Cases, Domestic Violence Diversion, County Ordinance Cases



# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit - Specialty Courts

- **Specialty Courts Goals and Objectives:**
  - Designed to assist participants in locating housing, employment, vocational training, educational resources, treatment and various rehabilitation services to reduce drug use, relapse and criminal recidivism.
  - Random drug testing, graduated sanctions and incentives, scheduled court status hearings to assist the participant in the recovery process.
  - Participants are supervised without compromising public/community safety.
  - The goal of Dependency Drug court is to provide assistance and resources necessary to overcome addiction and increase the likelihood of family reunification.
  - Mental Health Court focuses on providing mentally-ill defendants with the opportunity to receive community-based treatment and services to improve the quality of life, promote independent living, and reduce recidivism.
  - Mental Health Court participants are paired with peer support specialist to assist with community reintegration and successful completion of the program.

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – Specialty Courts

- **Specialty Courts Goals and Objectives Continued:**
  - Veteran's Treatment Court in partnership with the Veteran's Administration aim to assist felony or misdemeanor combat and non-combat veterans by providing recovery and rehabilitation services.
  - Veteran Treatment Court participants are assigned trained Veteran mentors.
  - The Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist assist the participant in obtaining substance abuse and mental health treatment appointments.

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – Specialty Courts

- **About our Specialty Courts:**

- **The 1<sup>st</sup> Drug Court** in the 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit began in Martin County February 2001. Currently, we have 11 Drug Courts. The total number of cases served in the 19<sup>th</sup> circuit - Martin County 2,276; St. Lucie County 3,262; Indian River County 1,434 and Okeechobee County 776.
- **The 1<sup>st</sup> Mental Health Court** began in St. Lucie County June 2006. Currently, we have 3 Mental Health Courts. The total number of cases served St. Lucie County 1,905; Indian River County 174.
- **The 1<sup>st</sup> Veteran's Court** began in Indian River County September 2013. Currently, we have 2 Veteran's Courts. The total number of cases served in the 19<sup>th</sup> circuit - St. Lucie County 80; Indian River County 36.

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – Specialty Courts

- **About our Specialty Courts Continued:**
  - In 2016 Drug Court served
    - 251 participants in St. Lucie County ; 85 graduated
    - 120 participants in Martin County; 44 graduated
    - 102 participants in Okeechobee County; 48 graduated
    - 102 participants in Indian River County; 26 graduated
    - 4 Drug free babies born in Drug Court

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – Specialty Courts

- **About our Specialty Courts Continued:**
  - In 2016 Mental Health Court served
    - 248 participants in St. Lucie County; 49 graduated; recidivism rate 9.78%
    - 38 participants in Martin County ; 6 graduated; recidivism rate 17.24%
    - 123 participants in Indian River County; 10 graduated; recidivism rate 5.2%
  - In 2016 Veteran’s Court served
    - 34 participants in St. Lucie County; 16 graduated
    - 16 participants in Indian River County; 2 graduated

# 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – Specialty Courts

Our specialty courts guide participants to remain substance free, keep on their treatment plans, obtain employment and stable housing, and refrain from law violations. Participants are able to develop stability in their lives, improve self-image, improve relationships, and become positive and productive members of the community.

**A win - win for all.**