

# TWENTIETH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

## ANNUAL REPORT FY 2016-17



CIRCUIT COURT  
COUNTY COURT  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

SERVING FIVE COUNTIES IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA: CHARLOTTE COUNTY,  
COLLIER COUNTY, GLADES COUNTY, HENDRY COUNTY AND LEE COUNTY



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The Twentieth Judicial Circuit of Florida includes five counties in Southwest Florida:

- LEE COUNTY
- CHARLOTTE COUNTY
- COLLIER COUNTY
- HENDRY COUNTY
- GLADES COUNTY

## Our Mission

*The mission of the Administrative Office of the Courts is to provide the highest level of professional services with integrity, equality, and respect that supports the judiciary in their efforts to protect rights and liberties, ensure access to justice for all citizens, and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes in a fair and timely manner.*



# 20TH CIRCUIT COURT OVERVIEW

## CIRCUIT COURT

Each county is served by the circuit court and the county court. The circuit court handled 41,540 cases through June 30, 2016 for FY 2015-2016. The circuit court is the court of general jurisdiction and has responsibility for probate matters (wills), civil actions in which the disputed amount exceeds \$15,000, and felony criminal cases which includes cases punishable by more than one year in state prison. Circuit court also hears cases in equity such as domestic relations (divorce, child custody, and injunctions for protection), juvenile proceedings and petitions for writs. The circuit court hears appeals from county court. Circuit judges are either elected or appointed and serve six year terms. Circuit judges are assigned throughout the Circuit as needed to handle the caseloads in the respective counties.

## COUNTY COURT

County court is a limited jurisdiction court which hears misdemeanors (criminal offenses punishable by up to one year in county jail), violations of county and municipal ordinances, traffic matters, civil actions in which the amount in dispute does not exceed \$15,000 and small claims disputes (small claims court hears civil disputes in which the amount in dispute is \$5,000 or less). County court also hears all landlord and tenant proceedings relating to the right of possession. County judges are elected or appointed to six year terms and serve within the county of their election. County judges can be authorized under certain circumstances to handle circuit court cases. The county courts handled 106,314 cases across all five counties through June 30, 2016 for FY 2015-2016.



## Our Vision

*The Administrative Office of the Courts will provide professional, efficient, effective service to the Courts focusing on our core businesses:*

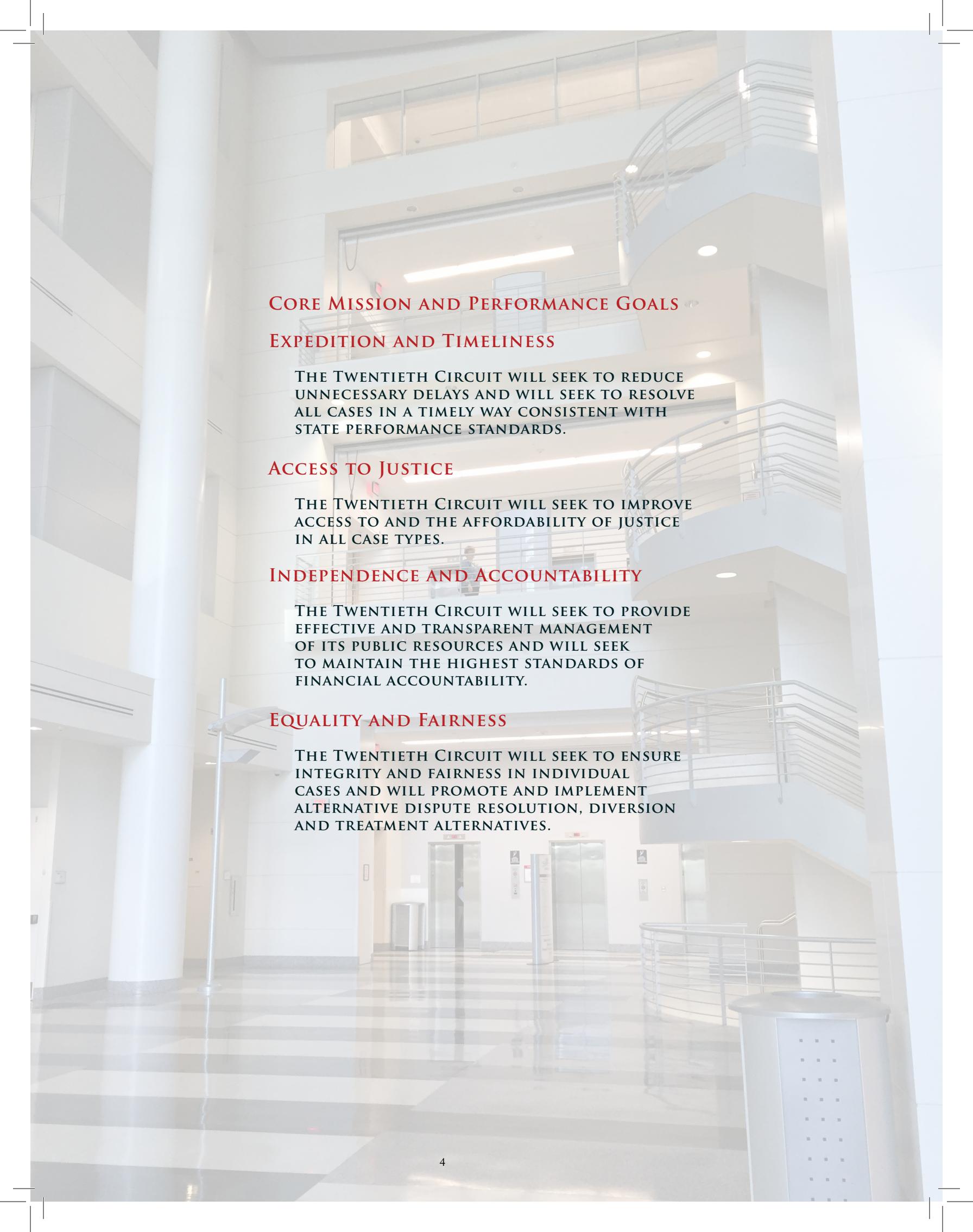
*Be fair, equitable, and conduct business with integrity.*

*Uphold the principles of judicial independence and accountability.*

*Be accessible, convenient, understandable and timely.*

*Be effective.*

*Be responsive and anticipate the needs of those we serve.*



## **CORE MISSION AND PERFORMANCE GOALS**

### **EXPEDITION AND TIMELINESS**

THE TWENTIETH CIRCUIT WILL SEEK TO REDUCE UNNECESSARY DELAYS AND WILL SEEK TO RESOLVE ALL CASES IN A TIMELY WAY CONSISTENT WITH STATE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.

### **ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

THE TWENTIETH CIRCUIT WILL SEEK TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO AND THE AFFORDABILITY OF JUSTICE IN ALL CASE TYPES.

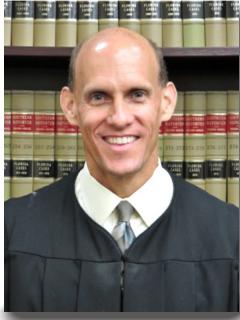
### **INDEPENDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

THE TWENTIETH CIRCUIT WILL SEEK TO PROVIDE EFFECTIVE AND TRANSPARENT MANAGEMENT OF ITS PUBLIC RESOURCES AND WILL SEEK TO MAINTAIN THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

### **EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS**

THE TWENTIETH CIRCUIT WILL SEEK TO ENSURE INTEGRITY AND FAIRNESS IN INDIVIDUAL CASES AND WILL PROMOTE AND IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION, DIVERSION AND TREATMENT ALTERNATIVES.

# Message from the Chief Judge



## THE HONORABLE MICHAEL MCHUGH

It is my pleasure to introduce you to the Twentieth Judicial Circuit's Court Performance Annual Report. The following report outlines the incredible work the Judicial Branch has done in Charlotte, Collier, Hendry, Glades, and Lee Counties. This Circuit has been in the forefront of case management and technology implementation and I am hoping this report will give you a better understanding of how our court system works throughout our Circuit.

The report outlines how our programs and initiatives work in each location and provides the numbers that demonstrate the tremendous amount and high quality of work that is being done. The report also outlines some of the achievements our outstanding work has garnered, and highlights the programs that have been implemented to streamline the litigation process within our circuit. It is evident that although the events in the courtroom are the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the court system, they are just the tip of the iceberg in regards to the services provided by the court system in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit.

The Circuit tries to provide all the tools to empower litigants to manage and resolve their cases and disputes in the way that best suits them. On the criminal side, we are proud to have one of the only accredited Criminal Divisions (Lee County Pretrial Services and Lee County Probation) in the state. This is a distinction held by a small percentage of pretrial and probation departments and demonstrates the division's dedication to excellence. We also have a fully implemented and established differentiated case management program that has led to the efficient and fair resolution of cases within our circuit. This system has reduced caseloads on our dockets significantly since implementation and gives us more time to handle the complex cases. Recently we have worked with law enforcement Circuit wide to install an electronic warrant program that allows for much quicker delivery, review, and execution of search warrants. This system not only ensures law enforcements ability to obtain evidence in a lawful way, it also saves time, money, and

resources by allowing for a quicker and more efficient gathering of evidence.

On the Civil side, the Twentieth Judicial Circuit has recently completed implementation of its Circuit wide Unified Family Courts. This program allows for consistency in the handling of all family matters by one judge. The matching of divorce, delinquency, dependency, paternity, and any other family law matters makes sure that the Judge assigned to a case knows the whole picture of what is being faced by families in our community. Our Circuit also boasts one of the few differentiated case management systems for civil cases in the State of Florida. This system allows for a more efficient, fair and predictable resolution of cases. It helps ensure that civil litigants within our circuit won't be heard to say that "their justice was denied by being delayed."

The Circuit has also implemented Circuit wide judicial viewers so that judges and judicial workers have the ability to access the information they need to effectively do the jobs they are charged with. The next technological program being worked on is called return integration. The program will allow judges to electronically sign orders from the bench or their office and instantaneously send to the attorneys, litigants, the clerk's office, and all other entitled parties. This technology will not only save time, but will save resources of all participants in the judicial system.

I am extremely proud to serve as Chief Judge of the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. I hope that after you review this report you will be as impressed with the systems in place to ensure cases are being handled as fairly and as efficiently as possible as I am. Also, rest assured that we will not get complacent and will always look for ways to improve our court system so that we will always provide the fair, equitable, and efficient resolution of cases that the citizens of the Twentieth Judicial Circuit deserve.

**O**ur strategic goals remain focused on improving our circuit's ability to meet our fundamental mission, most clearly outlined in the Florida Supreme Court's Long Range Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch for 2016-2021:

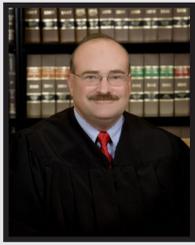
**To be accessible, the Florida justice system will be convenient, understandable, timely, and affordable to everyone.**

**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.**



PAUL ALESSANDRONI,  
COUNTY JUDGE  
CIRCUIT AND  
COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
CHARLOTTE COUNTY

# THE JUDICIARY SERVING CHARLOTTE COUNTY



MARY EVANS,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



DONALD MASON,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



GEORGE RICHARDS,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



LISA S. PORTER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



JOHN L. BURNS,  
COUNTY JUDGE



PETER B. BELL,  
COUNTY JUDGE



CHRISTINE GREIDER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE  
CIRCUIT  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
COLLIER COUNTY



ROB CROWN,  
COUNTY JUDGE  
COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
COLLIER COUNTY

# THE JUDICIARY SERVING COLLIER COUNTY



LAUREN L. BRODIE,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



JOSEPH FOSTER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



FREDERICK HARDT,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



HUGH D. HAYES,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



ELIZABETH KRIER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



RAMIRO MANALICH,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



JAMES SHENKO,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE

# THE JUDICIARY SERVING COLLIER COUNTY



MICHAEL CARR,  
COUNTY JUDGE



MICHAEL BROWN,  
COUNTY JUDGE



JIM MCGARITY,  
COUNTY JUDGE



JANEICE T. MARTIN,  
COUNTY JUDGE



MICHAEL J. PROVOST,  
COUNTY JUDGE

# THE JUDICIARY SERVING GLADES COUNTY

JACK LUNDY,  
COUNTY JUDGE  
CIRCUIT AND  
COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
GLADES COUNTY



JAMES SLOAN,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE

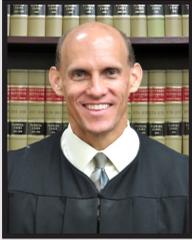
# THE JUDICIARY SERVING HENDRY COUNTY

JAMES D. SLOAN,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE  
CIRCUIT AND  
COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
HENDRY COUNTY



SCOTT CUPP,  
COUNTY JUDGE

# THE JUDICIARY SERVING LEE COUNTY



MICHAEL T. MCHUGH,  
CHIEF JUDGE



G. KEITH CARY,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE

CIRCUIT AND  
COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
LEE COUNTY



JOHN S. CARLIN,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE

FAMILY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
LEE COUNTY



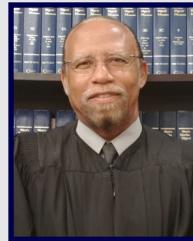
ALANE LABODA,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE

CIVIL  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
LEE COUNTY



J. FRANK PORTER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE

CRIMINAL  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
LEE COUNTY



JAMES ADAMS,  
COUNTY JUDGE

COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
LEE COUNTY



TARA PALUCK,  
COUNTY JUDGE

COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
JUDGE FOR  
LEE COUNTY



ELISABETH ADAMS,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



ROBERT BRANNING,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



JOHN DURYEA,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



JOSEPH C. FULLER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



GEOFFREY GENTILE,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



LEIGH F. HAYES,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



AMY HAWTHORNE,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



BRUCE KYLE,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



KEITH R. KYLE,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



LEE A. SCHREIBER,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



MARGARET STEINBECK,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



NICHOLAS THOMPSON,  
CIRCUIT JUDGE



JOSEPHINE GAGLIARDI,  
COUNTY JUDGE



MARIA E. GONZALEZ,  
COUNTY JUDGE



DEVIN S. GEORGE  
COUNTY JUDGE



ZACHARY M. GILL  
COUNTY JUDGE



ARCHIE HAYWARD,  
COUNTY JUDGE



H. ANDREW SWETT,  
COUNTY JUDGE



# 20TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is organized based on functional responsibilities that are rooted in judicial administration and court operations areas. Although these responsibilities are carried out across the organization, certain roles and activities are department specific.

## Court Administration Functions

- Caseflow Management
- Due Process Management
- Mediation/ADR Programs
- Diversion/Alternative Sanctions Programs
- Operations/Administration (Budget, HR, Technology, Court Facility Planning and Management)
- Pretrial Release
- Probation Services
- Public Guardian
- Court Security
- Staff Attorney Services



## The AOC's Three Core Businesses

### Adjudication

The 20th Judicial Circuit will fairly and timely resolve disputes brought before it

### Due Process Services

The 20th Judicial Circuit will seek and secure adequate resources to support the needs to the court

### Governance

The 20th Judicial Circuit will account for the prudent and efficient use of all allocated resources

## Circuit Court Administration



SCOTT WILSKER,  
TRIAL COURT  
ADMINISTRATOR



LIZA FLECHA,  
CHIEF DEPUTY COURT  
ADMINISTRATOR



SUZANNE EDERR,  
GENERAL COUNSEL



SARA MILES,  
PUBLIC  
INFORMATION  
OFFICER



JON EMBURY,  
CHARLOTTE  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
SERVICES MANAGER



CHUCK RICE,  
COLLIER  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
SERVICES MANAGER



DAWN OLIVER  
HENDRY & GLADES  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
SERVICES MANAGER



SHEILA JEROME,  
LEE COUNTY  
CIVIL/ FAMILY  
DIVISION DIRECTOR



AMY KINSEY,  
LEE COUNTY  
CRIMINAL  
DIVISION DIRECTOR



JEFF TORAIN,  
DIRECTOR OF COURT  
SECURITY



CRAIG MCLEAN,  
INFORMATION  
SERVICES DIRECTOR



LISA HARDER,  
FINANCE AND  
ACCOUNTING  
MANAGER



ERIC FISHBECK,  
OPERATIONS  
CONSULTANT



BROOKE DEAN,  
OPERATIONS  
DIVISION  
MANAGER



JULIO FERNANDEZ,  
SUPERVISING COURT  
INTERPRETER



SHARON SUHAR  
HUMAN RESOURCES  
MANAGER

# 20TH CIRCUIT COURT LOCATIONS OVERVIEW



## Lee Justice Center

**East Entrance**  
1700 Monroe Street  
Fort Myers, FL 33901

**South Entrance**  
2075 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Fort Myers, FL 33901

## Charlotte Justice Center

350 E. Marion Avenue  
Punta Gorda, FL 33950



## Collier Government Complex

3315 Tamiami Trail East  
Naples, FL 34112

## Hendry Courthouse

25 E. Hickpochee Ave.  
LaBelle, FL 33935



## Glades Courthouse

Rt 27, 500 Avenue "J"  
Moore Haven, FL 33471

# 20TH CIRCUIT COURT OPERATIONS OVERVIEW

## Americans with Disabilities Act

The Court Connect American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Webpage is actively used by the circuit to record ADA requests for assistance and was updated in 2016. Through CourtConnect the public is able to submit electronic requests for assistance. The ADA line had been the only access point in the past. Staff attend South West Florida ADA Council monthly meetings, as well as, ADA training sponsored by OSCA.



*There were a total of 67 ADA Requests for Assistance in Lee County in 2016.*

Services Requested in Lee Co.	Total
C.A.R.T	7
HEARING DEVICE	12
SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER	45
MAGNIFIER	2
LUMBAR CHAIR	1

## Circuit Wide Court Interpreter Services 2016

Type of Proceeding	Number of Events				Translation
	Spanish	Hatian-Creole	Other	ASL	Pages
Circuit Criminal	4615	135	74	21	105
County Criminal	4650	75	25	19	0
Family Court (Dependency/CINS/FINS)	332	52	7	2	0
Family Court (Delinquency)	400	174	0	5	0
Baker/Marchman/Guardianship	12	1	0	0	0
Domestic Violence Injunction	203	30	7	1	0
General Magistrate/CSHO for Family Law - All Other Title IV-D	1	0	0	0	0
Other Case Types	30	3	0	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10243</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>105</b>

## Committed to Excellence

The Operations Division consists of Court Interpreter Services, Facilities Services, Senior Judge and Judicial Support Services, Judge Lynn Gerald Law Library, and Information Desks/Volunteers devoted to the unified service of the Court.



The Lee County Jury assembly room was completed in December 2016.

## Court Interpreter Services

Lee County has three full-time Spanish Court Interpreters; Charlotte County has one full-time Spanish Court Interpreter, and Collier County has one full-time Spanish Court Interpreter which are all supervised by a working and supervising interpreter. A total of 25 contracted interpreters (individuals and/or agencies) also serve the courts. The languages provided include Spanish, Haitian-Creole, American Sign Language and a variety of exotic languages.



# LEE COUNTY CRIMINAL DIVISION OVERVIEW



## Overview and Organization

The Lee County Criminal Division, including the Pretrial Services and County Probation Departments, provides case management support to the thirteen judges in the criminal division. Both departments have unique objectives but work together collaboratively under the direction of the Trial Court Administrator and the Criminal Division Director.

## County Probation

The County Probation department was established in the early 1980's. It is comprised of twenty-nine employees, encompassing the Supervision Unit, Mental Health and Veterans Court. The mission is to promote public safety by enforcing court orders, supervising probationers and motivating positive behavioral change.

### PROBATION STATS FOR FY 2015-16



**5,627**  
total defendants  
ordered on county  
probation.



**42,038**  
hours of  
community  
service  
completed.

**62%**  
success rate

**\$2,572,501**  
collected from  
probationers  
through Clerk  
of Court.

## Pretrial Services

The Pretrial Services Department was established in 1988. It is comprised of thirty-five employees, plus an on-call employee, encompassing the Intake and Investigation Unit, the Case Supervision Unit and the Case Management Unit. The mission is to provide comprehensive case management services to the courts, from case inception through case closure, via professional staff committed to the highest standards of excellence.

### PRETRIAL SERVICES NUMBERS FOR FY 2015-16



**2,803**  
defendants  
placed on  
pretrial  
supervision.



**72**  
days was the  
average length of  
supervision.

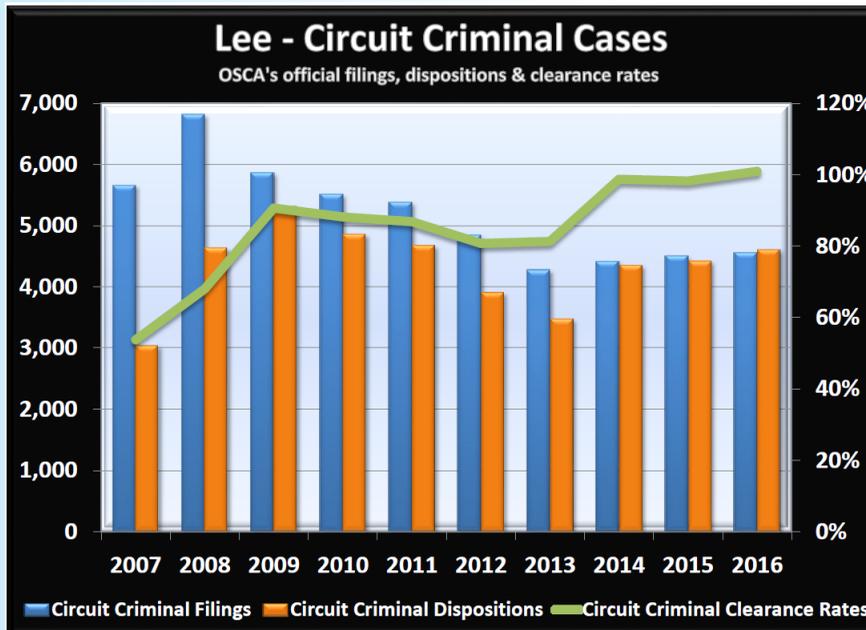


**94%**  
supervised defendants  
were not charged with  
new offense during  
pretrial stage

**80%**  
success rate

# LEE COUNTY

## OVERVIEW OF CRIMINAL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



In FY2015-16, Lee County experienced a decline in clearance rates in circuit court with a divisional clearance decrease of 15%. It should be noted that the clearance rate is a performance measure, which is defined as the number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases. The best improvement in the clearance rate occurred in the felony division where the ratio of cases disposed to cases filed resulted in improved clearance rates by 2.7%.

### Case Management: Court Performance Outcome Measures

**Time to Disposition** - Time to disposition measures the percentage of cases disposed or otherwise resolved within established timeframes and assesses the length of time it takes a court to process cases. In the 20th Judicial Circuit, time goals are established under Administrative Order 3.5. The goal is to resolve 80% of expedited cases within 180 days from the arrest date, standard cases within 240 days and complex cases within 360 days. Lee County met 88% of expedited cases, 91% of standard cases and 86% of complex cases for time goals. Early Resolution Court disposed of 2, 295 cases.

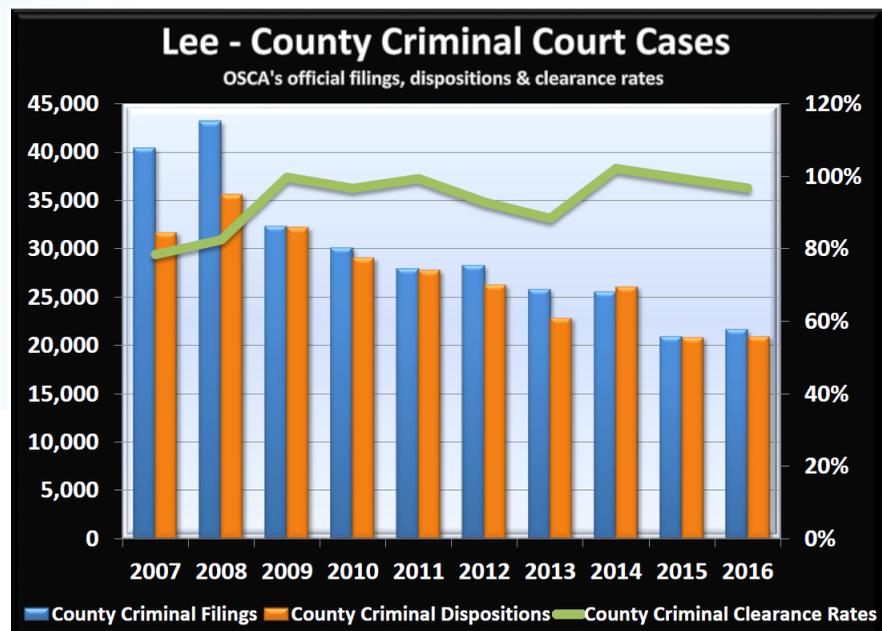
**Case Clearance** - Clearance rates are the number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases. A total of 6,123 cases were opened and 5,953 cases closed, resulting in a 98% clearance rate.

Trial date certainty was

**52%**



The number of times cases disposed by trial are scheduled for trial. The ability of courts to hold trials when scheduled to be heard is closely associated with timely disposition.



# LEE COUNTY CIVIL DIVISION OVERVIEW

## Alternative Dispute Resolution

The ADR program is comprised of four support staff with one assigned as the program manager for the small claims volunteer program. The other three staff review all cases referred to ADR, prepare the orders scheduling and assign the mediator or arbitrator from the list maintained and approved by the court.

IN 2016...

**1,901**

County Small Claims mediations held

**57**

County Civil mediations held

**1,519**

Family Court mediations held

**509**

Dependency mediations held

## Civil Case Management

### 2016 Civil Cases Excluding Residential Foreclosure

**1,950** CMC's set

**494** CMC's held

### 2016 Residential Foreclosure

**160.58%**  
clearance rate average

Civil Case Management is comprised of five case managers for the five Civil court judges and one program assistant. The Civil Case Managers obtain a list of cases (non residential foreclosure) filed each month and set up alerts for 120 days from date of filing to check for service and 150 days to check for Agreed Case Management Plan's (ACMP) that have been submitted. If the ACMP was not submitted, case managers set a Case Management Conference (CMC) based on the time frames contained in the plan and an alert date to determine compliance with the plan. If the parties have not submitted a plan approved by the court, then at the CMC the case manager meets with the parties/attorneys to assist them.

As for the Residential foreclosure cases, the Case Managers obtain a list of all cases filed each month and send out a case plan, monitor the cases, set motions for hearings (if not scheduled by the parties within 30 days of filing), schedule Judicial CMC's, trials, and prepare orders for judges.

## Teen Court and Juvenile Arbitration

There was an increase in Juvenile Arbitration and Teen Court referrals from the State Attorney's Office. In 2016, the program had 276 referrals combined (236 for Juvenile Arbitration and 40 for Teen Court), whereas in 2015, the program received 237 referrals. The cases were more diverse; including more cases of Battery (DV), more felonies (Grand Theft and Marijuana Over 20 Grams).

### Juvenile Arbitration

**97%** successful  
**3%** referred back

### Teen Court

**99%** successful  
**1%** referred back

**2,847**  
total community service hours for 2016

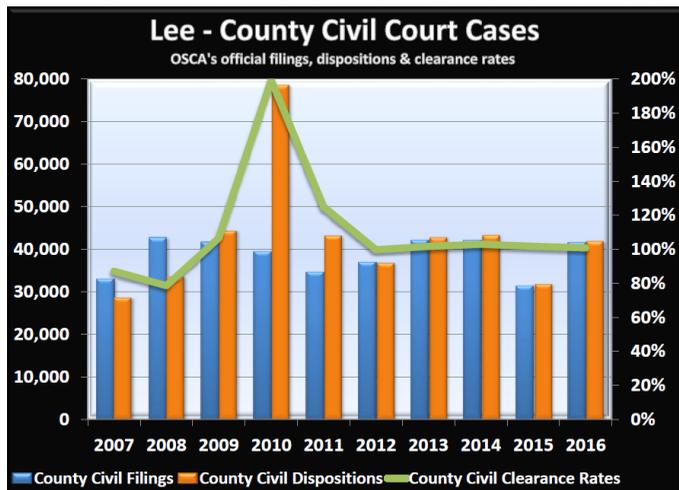
In 2016, there were **27** sessions of Teen Court.

**216** total Juvenile Arbitration closures for 2016

In 2016, the Teen Court Volunteers logged **856** hours.

# LEE COUNTY

## OVERVIEW OF CIVIL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



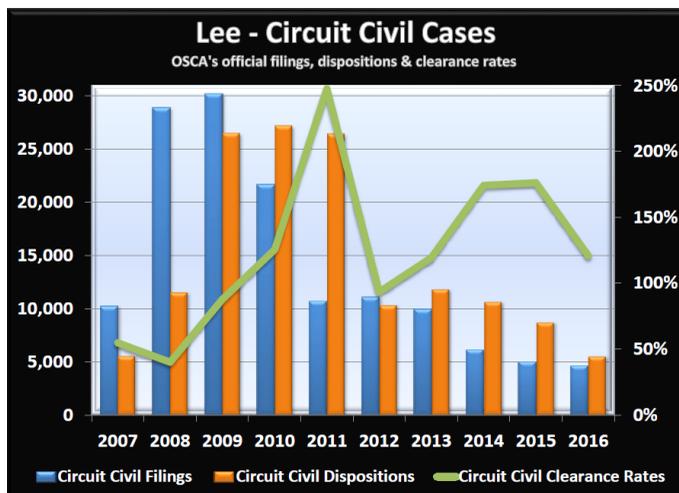
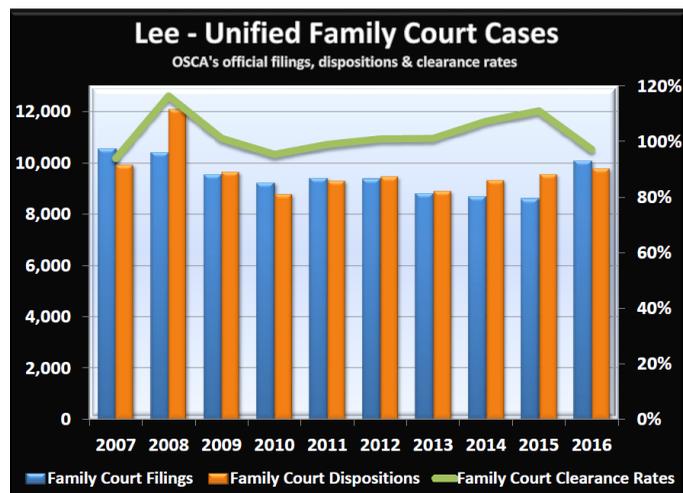
The overall clearance rate for all County Civil cases was approximately 101% through June 30, 2016.

(This includes small claims, civil, other civil, evictions, and civil traffic infractions.)

**Total County Civil Filings: 41,597**

**Total County Civil Dispositions: 41,935**

In July 2016, Unified Family Court was implemented in the Domestic Violence division. The new procedures have impacted litigant process time for two reasons; intake must call judicial assistants to get dates on the judge's calendar and extra time is needed to review the related juvenile cases.



The overall clearance rate for all Circuit Civil cases, with the exception of family cases, was approximately 121% through June 30, 2016.

**Total Circuit Civil Filings: 4,605**

**Total Circuit Civil Dispositions: 5,563**

**2,762** estimated Injunction for Protection cases filed in 2016  
DV filings decreased from the previous year by **6%**

The OSCA's official, audited caseload report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2016 reveal that Lee County's overall circuit-court filings increased by 6.9% over the prior twelve-month period. This overall increase in circuit-court filings was driven by a 17% jump in unified-family filings, coupled with a 9% bump in Probate. These large increases were offset by decreased filings in the circuit-civil division (down 7%).

During FY2015-16, Lee's overall performance in circuit-court case dispositions decreased by 9.6%. This decrease was led by a 36% drop in the circuit-civil over the past year. In contrast, increases occurred in the probate (8%) and family (2%) divisions. Over the past year, the number of dispositions in the Lee's county-court increased by 19%. This jump was led by a 32% increase in the county-civil division.

# CHARLOTTE COUNTY CRIMINAL DIVISION OVERVIEW

## Committed To Excellence

The Charlotte County Criminal Division consists of 16 employees devoted to the unified service of the Court as it pertains to enforcing the Court's orders while delivering fair and consistent treatment to defendants and a noticeable and positive contribution to the Charlotte County area.

## Pretrial Services

The Pretrial Services Department is comprised of an Intake and Investigation Unit which works at the Charlotte County Jail, a Criminal Circuit Case Management Unit, a Diversion Unit, a Court Presenter/Pretrial Release Unit, a Specialty Court Coordinator and a Secretary. Each unit has specific core functions and work collaboratively to support the department's mission.

### PRETRIAL SERVICES NUMBERS FY 2015-16



**98%** of defendants did not commit a new law violation while on supervision



**ZERO**  
Failure to appear



**5,896**  
defendants screened for first appearance.



**95%**  
success rate

## County Probation

The Charlotte County Probation Department is comprised of Probation Officers and Clerical Support Staff. The Probation Officers are encouraged to follow a rehabilitative supervision model while monitoring their assigned cases. The Clerical Staff plays a pivotal role in the department's ongoing progression. This process begins at intake; as the defendant enters the department for the first time. The tone is set at this juncture through an exchange of information that culminates in the preparation of the probation file. The information contained therein is constantly updated by the Probation Officer as the defendant completes their Court-ordered conditions.

### FY 2015-16 PROBATION STATS



**68%**  
success rate



**346,123.65**  
collected from the cost of supervision in a calendar year

# CHARLOTTE COUNTY

## OVERVIEW OF CRIMINAL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES

### 2016 Statistics

# 2,313

Criminal Felony Cases filed in Charlotte County in 2016

*Circuit-criminal filings experienced a 22% decrease over the last twelve months and a 30% decrease compared to FY2011-12.*

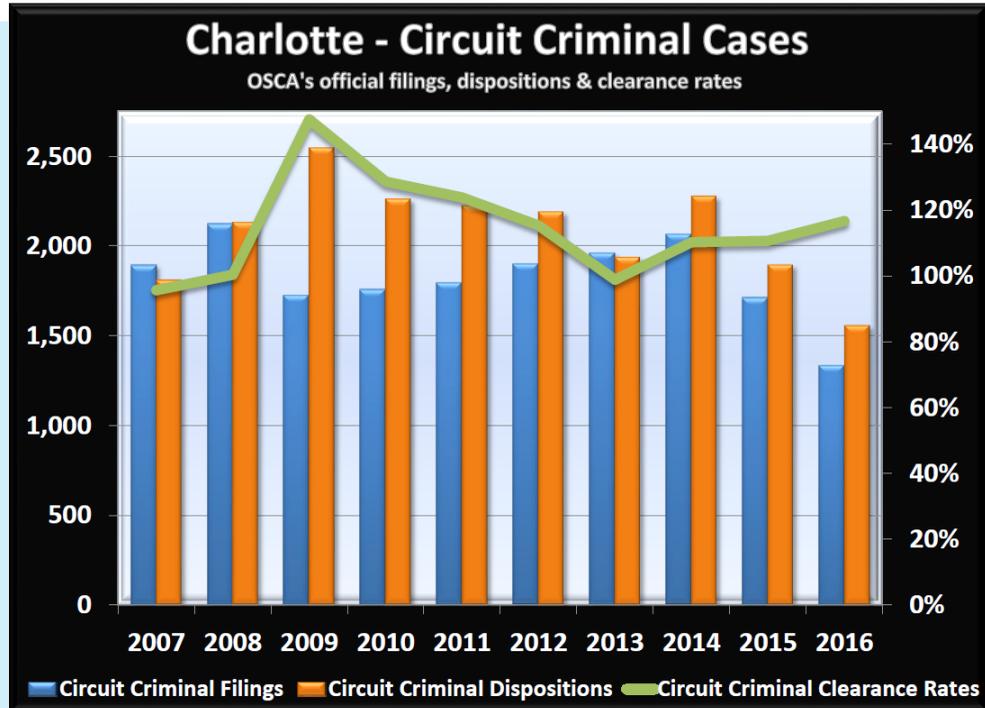
# 35%

Continuance rate for cases at case management conferences in 2016

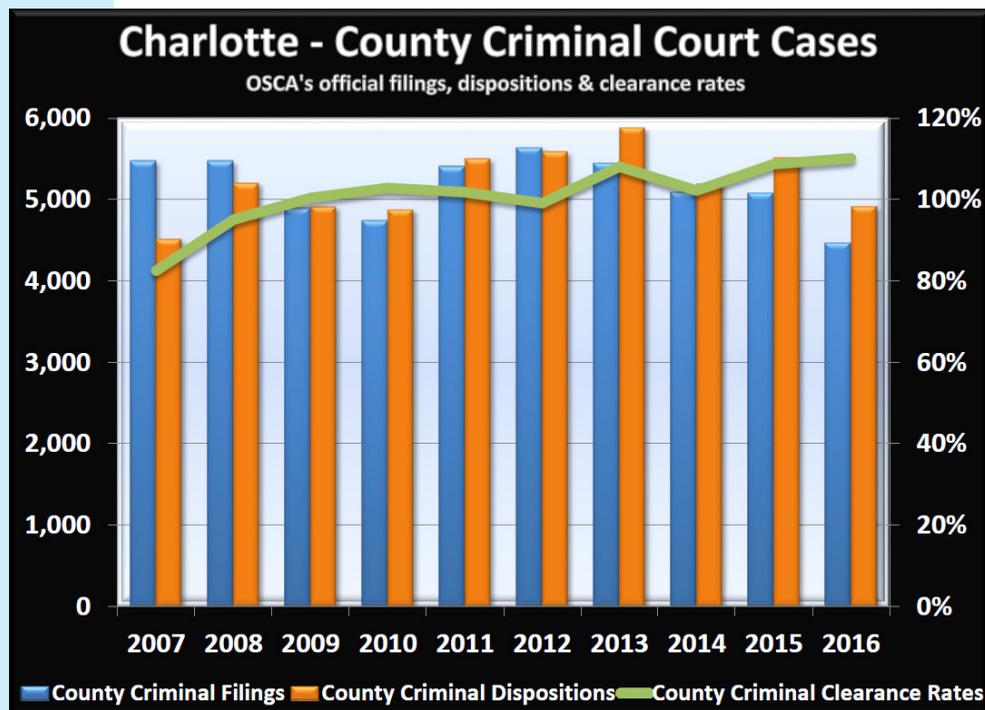
*In FY2015-16, Charlotte County experienced positive clearance rates. One of the best improvements in the clearance rate occurred in the felony division where the clearance rate improved by 5%.*

# 27%

Continuance rate for cases at pretrial conferences in 2016



Pretrial Case Managers monitor felony criminal cases at each stage as they move through the judicial system in an effort to ensure a timely disposition of cases. Case events are tracked and caseload status updates are provided to the court. These updates include pending caseload data, age of pending caseloads and identified delayed cases. Key goals are to ensure meaningful court events, increase dispositions against filings and improve early disposition rates. Pretrial officers attend all felony arraignments, case management conferences, pretrial conferences and trial calls to assist with the scheduling of cases, documentation of court events and tracking of continuances.

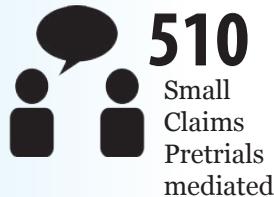
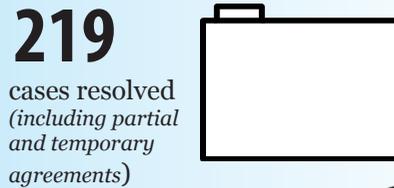


# CHARLOTTE COUNTY CIVIL DIVISION OVERVIEW

The Charlotte County Civil/Family division consists of the Civil Division Director, 10 Full time employees dedicated to assisting the Judiciary with moving cases through the system within the time periods set through unified courts.

## Alternative Dispute Resolution & Court Mediation Programs

IN 2016...



Located in the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Court Mediation Program coordinates the Citizens Dispute Settlement Program and Court Ordered Mediation services to associated litigants utilizing Certified Volunteer and Professional Mediators. Professional mediators have signed a Vendor Contract with the State of Florida and are paid at the State mandated determined rate. Although not all cases can be completely resolved through mediation, the benefit of mediation before a trial is that many of the issues HAVE BEEN resolved, cutting down on Court's time needed to determine the outcome of the unresolved issues.

### Court Mediation Programs:

Citizens Dispute Settlement Program

Small Claims Mediation

Family Mediation Program

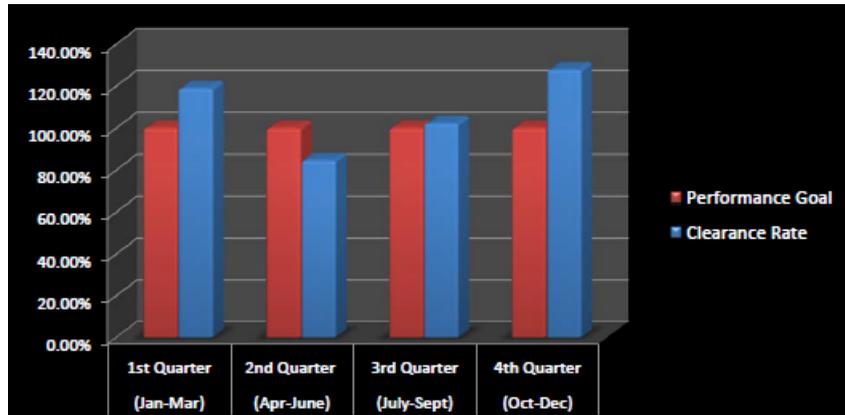
Circuit and County Court Mediation

## Family Case Management

In Charlotte County, the Family Law Case Management Team provides both Self-Help services and case management for the court. The role of the case manager is to ensure that cases move quickly and efficiently to a final disposition while providing pro se litigants with the resources they need to proceed in their cases. The case managers work closely with the Family Division Judge and Magistrate.

### Family Case Management Clearance Report 2016

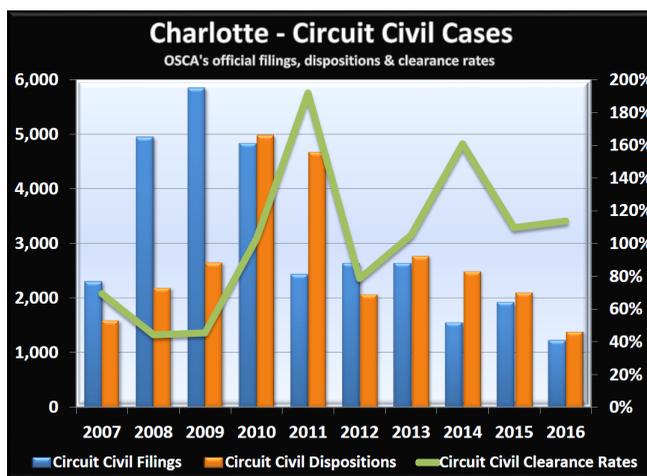
*In 2016, 667 Family Law cases identified in the Charlotte County Civil/Family Case Management Database were opened and 705 cases in the same year were disposed. This generated a clearance rate of 106% of the cases that were managed by the Family Law Case Managers in 2016 assigned to Judge Leigh Frizzell Hayes.*



# CHARLOTTE COUNTY OVERVIEW OF CIVIL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES

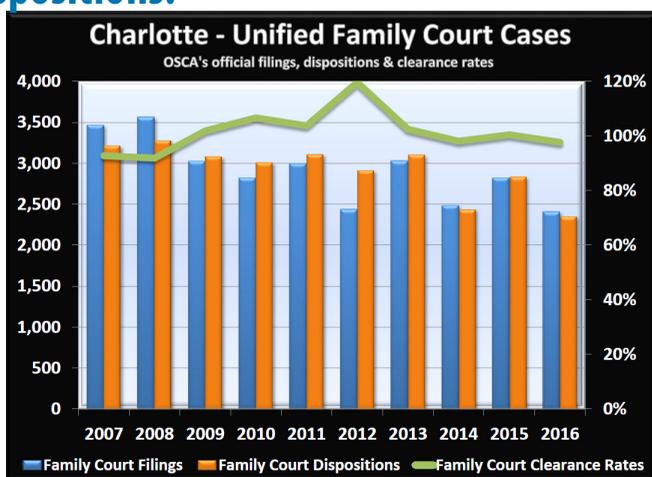
The overall clearance rate for all Circuit Civil cases, with the exception of family cases, was approximately 114% through June 30, 2016.

**Total Circuit Civil Filings: 1,224**  
**Total Circuit Civil Dispositions: 1,392**



The OSCA's official, audited caseload report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2016 reveal that Charlotte County's overall circuit-court filings decreased by 18% over the prior twelve-month period. This overall decline in circuit-court filings was driven by a 36% drop in circuit-civil filings. The unified-family division slumped over the most recent year by 15% (although decreasing by only 1% as compared to 2012).

Charlotte's overall performance in circuit-court case dispositions declined by 18%. This decrease was led by a 34% reduction in the circuit-civil division over the past year.

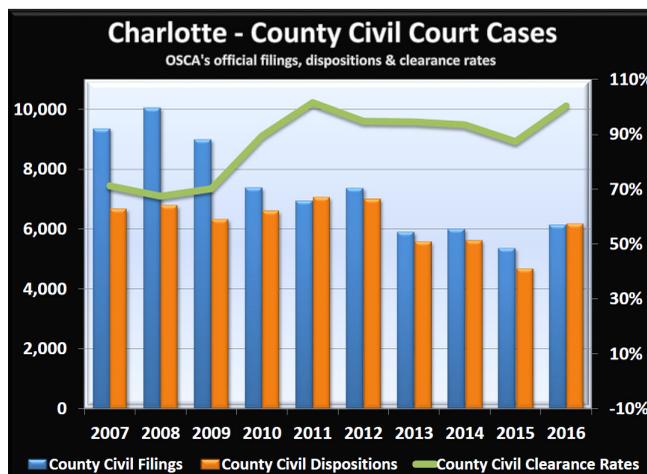


**Total County Civil Filings: 6,142**

**Total County Civil Dispositions: 6,165**

The overall clearance rate for all County Civil cases was approximately 100%.

(This includes small claims, civil, other civil, evictions, and civil traffic infractions.)



## CHARLOTTE COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FILINGS 2016



In 2016 there were 894 Domestic Violence Petitions filed, this is a decrease from 919 filed in 2015. Stalking and Cyber Stalking continue to be the most filed Petitions since going into effect October 1, 2012.

# COLLIER COUNTY CRIMINAL DIVISION OVERVIEW

## County Probation

The mission of the Collier County Probation Department is to protect the community by providing the highest quality of services to the court, and to the citizens of Collier County. The County Probation Department has experienced another productive year while administering the orders of the Court to Misdemeanor Defendants. During a time when the number of arrests have decreased to levels not seen since the 1970's; the number of defendants supervised has remained basically unchanged over the past few years.

IN 2016...



**1,050**

of defendants supervised on average each month

**78%**

completed probation cases



**1,090**

Violation of Probation affidavits submitted

**\$1,183,759**



**TOTAL AMOUNT COLLECTED BY PROBATION DEPARTMENT IN 2016.**

*THIS INCLUDES PROBATION AND DIVERSION FEES.*



*Above: Collier County Probation Department staff*

## Deferred Prosecution

The Probation Department acts as Administrator for the State Attorney's Deferred Prosecution Program; otherwise known as Diversion. The program is generally designed for first time offenders and, in most cases, lasts for three months. If the participant completes the program successfully, the State Attorney's Office does not file the original charge with the Clerk of Court.

**20%**

increase in number of participants from previous year

**79%**

completed diversion cases

## Felony Case Management

Differentiated Case Management (DCM) was instituted in Collier County on July 1, 2014 to address the backlog of felony criminal cases by encouraging meaningful court dates for all cases and goal date compliance as determined through the DCM system.

During the 2016 calendar year, a review of track goal compliance for closed cases within the division revealed....

**Expedited**

**371**

resolved within the 180 day time goal out of 421 cases

**Standard**

**233**

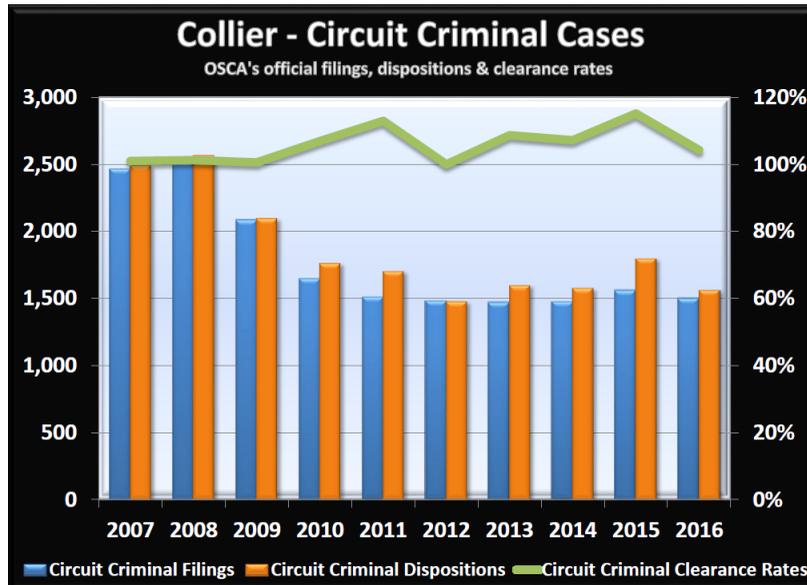
resolved within the 240 day time goal out of 257 cases

**Complex**

**4**

cases resolved within the 325 day time goal out of 4 cases

# COLLIER COUNTY OVERVIEW OF CRIMINAL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



A review of Open Differentiated Case Management cases by track for the CY 2016 revealed the following: The Circuit Criminal division has 160 pending cases, with an arrest date between January 1, 2008 – December 31, 2016, that are designated an expedited track, 31 of which are past their goal dates (81% of cases currently within track period). There are 373 pending cases, with an arrest date between January 1, 2008 – December 31, 2016, that are designated a standard track, 102 of which are past their goal dates (73% of cases currently within track period). Finally there are 91 pending cases, with an arrest date between January 1, 2008 – December 31, 2016, that are designated complex, 25 of which are past their goal dates (73% of cases currently within track period).

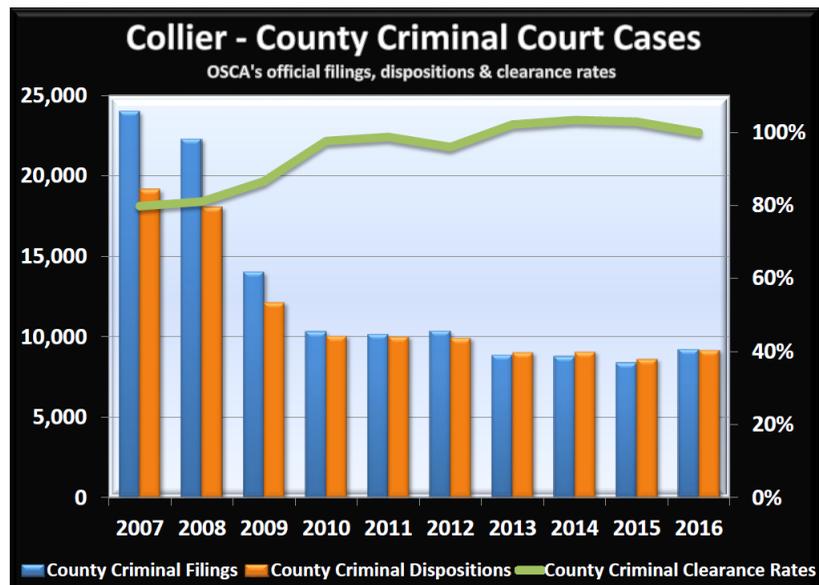
## Calendar Year 2016

**2,346**  
cases were  
filed

**2,410**  
cases were  
disposed

**103%**  
combined  
clearance rate

A review of the felony criminal division pending cases as of December 31, 2016, reflects a total number of pending cases of 780. The age of case breakdown is as follows: 528 cases have been pending for less than 180 days, 67 cases have been pending between 181-240 days, 55 cases have been pending between 241- 365 days, and 130 have been pending over 365 days. This report does not specify differentiation by track and only identified cases by age of case.



# COLLIER COUNTY CIVIL DIVISION OVERVIEW

## Unified Family Court

Unified Family Court includes Domestic Relations, Family Law Cases, Names Changes, Adoptions, Domestic Violence Cases, Dependency Cases and Delinquency Cases.

*One Family, One Judge*

**572** 2016 JUDICIAL CASE  
MANAGEMENT  
CONFERENCES

**561** 2016 UNCONTESTED  
DISSOLUTIONS OF  
MARRIAGE

## Court Mediation Programs

**549**  
approximate number  
of small claims  
mediations held

**271** cases were referred to  
the Family mediation  
court-programs

**65.4%**  
resolution rate for  
Dependency mediation

**27** county civil cases were  
referred to the court  
program

## Civil Case Management

In January 2016, a civil case manager position was approved by the Board of County Commissioners. The Civil Case Manager handles Foreclosures and Civil Cases for three circuit court judges. During the first half of 2016, this newly added position was dedicated to continue to reduce backlog in the foreclosure caseload. From February through June 2016, twenty two court dates were convened which, at the end of the additional court time, allowed for the distribution of cases back to the assigned Judge with the ability to manage their case load by holding one case management and Non-Jury Trial court date every 6 to 8 weeks.

### Overview and Organization

The Family and Civil Division Team consists of the following: three Unified Family Case Managers; one Civil Case Manager; one Mediator; three Magistrates and three Magistrate Administrative Assistants that all fall under the supervision of the Civil & Family Division Director except for the Magistrates (under the supervision of the Administrative Services Manager). The caseload the division supports is three Unified Family Circuit Judges and three Civil Circuit Judges.

### Court Mediation Programs:

**Small Claims Mediation**

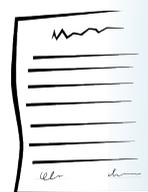
**Family Mediation Program**

**Dependency Mediation**

**County Civil Mediation**

If a Self-Represented dissolution of marriage case resolves via Court Mediation, the Case Manager reports to the Mediation Office with the Uncontested Docket (UCD) Affidavits and blank copies of any missing required documents which are executed by the parties and notarized by the Case Manager prior to the parties' departure from Mediation. Once the paperwork is docketed in Showcase, the Case Manager prepares the UCD Checklist and the appropriate Final Judgment with copies and envelopes which are sent to the assigned Judge's office for UCD Placement. A subsequent appearance by the Self-Represented parties is eliminated since a courtesy certified copy of the signed Final Judgment will then be mailed to each party.

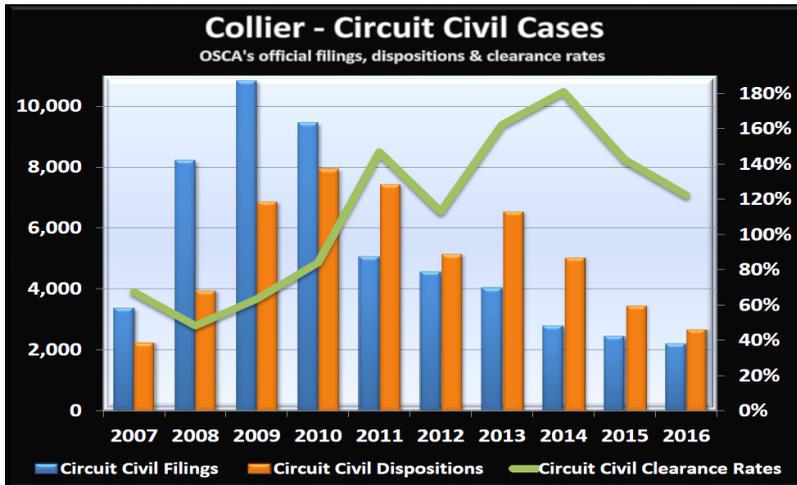
**2,810**  
cases were brought to  
disposition in Collier  
County (as of Dec 31,  
2016.)



**612**  
case management  
conferences were set in  
2016.

# COLLIER COUNTY

## OVERVIEW OF CIVIL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



The overall clearance rate for all Circuit Civil cases, with the exception of family cases, was approximately 122% through June 30, 2016.

**Total Circuit Civil Filings: 2,205**

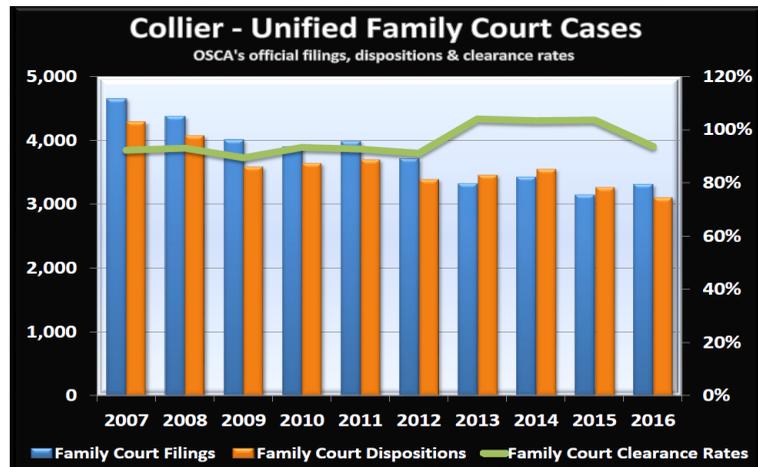
**Total Circuit Civil Dispositions: 2,699**

(This includes Prof. Malpractice & Prod. Liability, Auto & Other Negligence, Contracts & Real Property, and Other cases.)

On Feb. 7, 2017, the OSCA released its official, audited caseload report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2016. These audited filings reveal that Collier County's overall circuit-court filings decreased by -0.5% over the prior twelve-month period. This overall decrease in circuit-court filings was driven by a 10% decline in circuit-civil filings. The unified-family division increased over the most recent year by 5.1% this year, while maintaining downward 11% decline since 2012.

During FY2015-16, Collier's overall performance in circuit-court case dispositions declined by 12%. This decrease was led by a -22% reduction in the circuit-civil division over the past year as well as a reduction in the felony division (-13%).

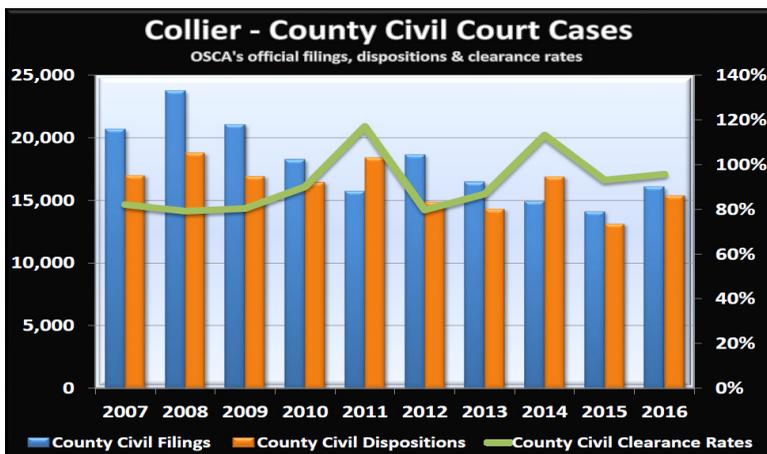
In FY2015-16, Collier County experienced overall positive clearance rates in circuit-court with divisions operating above 100%, as taken in the aggregate.



The overall clearance rate for all Circuit Civil cases, with the exception of family cases, was approximately 96% through June 30, 2016.

**Total County Civil Filings: 16,078**

**Total County Civil Dispositions: 15,400**



# HENDRY COUNTY CRIMINAL DIVISION OVERVIEW

## Felony Case Management

Hendry County Circuit Criminal Court uses the Differentiated Case Management model to monitor and track all felony criminal cases. The case manager maintains detailed case notes regarding all ongoing discovery issues and assists the courts in identifying cases that could be deferred into early intervention programs. Case management ensures early disposition in appropriate cases and allows for adequate time for trial preparation in the more complex cases.

In 2016, the average pending felony caseload was **413** cases.

## Probation Department

The Hendry County Probation Department pursuant to Florida Statute § 948.08, and §948.15 provides services to offenders adjudicated of misdemeanors who are ordered to comply with conditions of probation. Currently, the office is comprised of two Probation Officers, one of which is designated as team lead, and a Secretary III for support. The average daily caseload including Diversion and Probation Cases is approximately 222 offenders per officer, which is consistent with the previous year.

IN 2016...

**444**

new cases ordered to comply with conditions of supervision

**61%**

completed their probation successfully

**7**

participants terminated the program unsuccessfully for technical violations for non-compliance with their GPS monitoring conditions in 2016.



**45**

defendants were referred to the Pretrial Supervision Program in 2016.

## Pretrial Supervision

The Hendry County Pretrial Supervision Program is designed to provide bail options to the courts while upholding public safety.



**76%**

success rate in 2016.

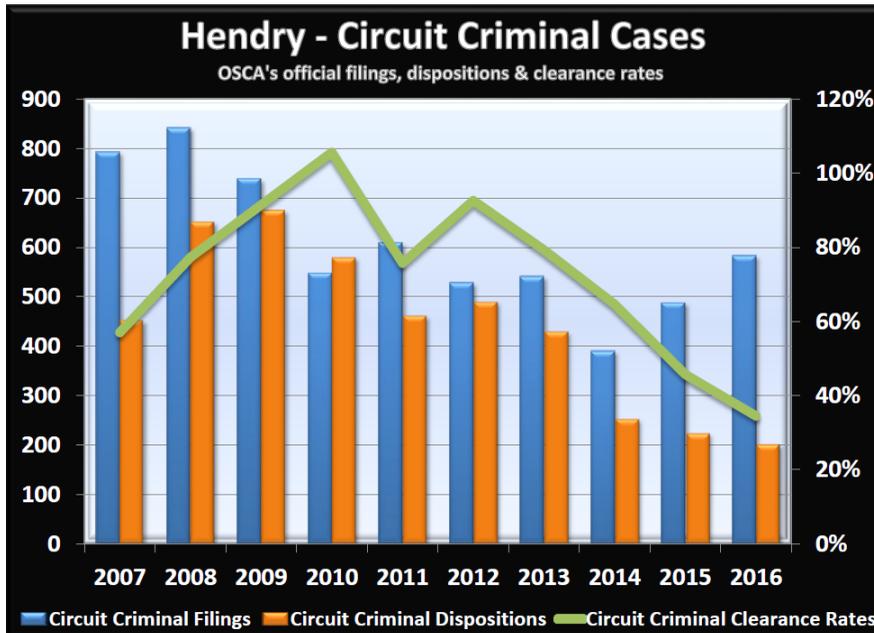
Out of the **208** defendants diverted from formal prosecution, only **25** participants failed to complete their court ordered sanctions in 2016.

## Misdemeanor Pretrial Diversion

The Misdemeanor Pretrial Diversion Program is a voluntary deferred prosecution option that allows first time offenders charged with misdemeanors to complete conditions and if successfully completed, these cases are not prosecuted further. This cooperative effort between the State's Attorney's Office and Hendry County Probation helps to expedite cases through the judicial system while holding defendants accountable for their actions.

# HENDRY COUNTY

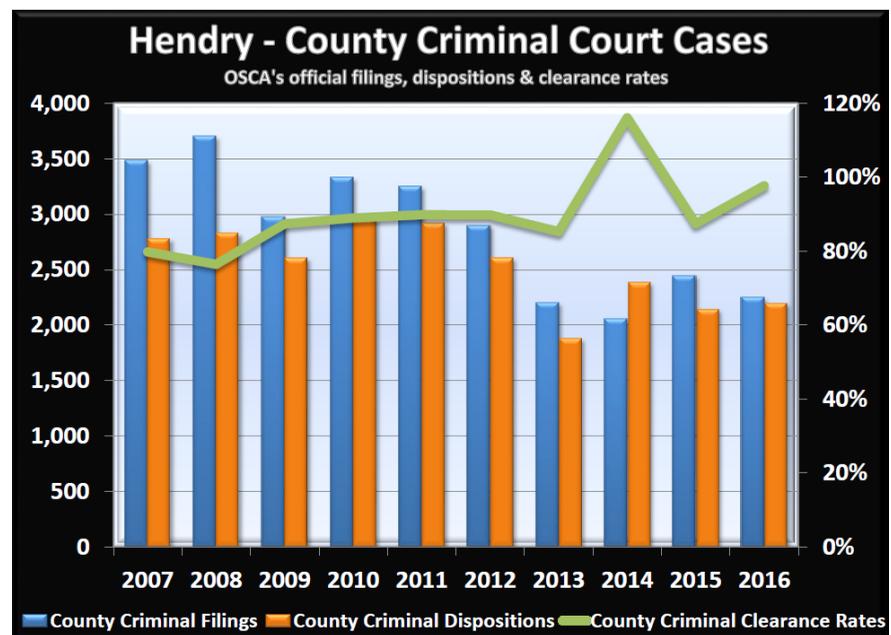
## OVERVIEW OF CRIMINAL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



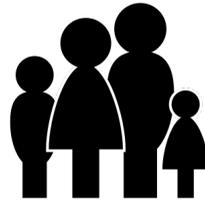
The Hendry County Circuit Felony filings have remained consistent with a slight decrease by approximately 1.7% since 2015. Felony filings are 35% less than 2012. A total of 925 felony cases were brought to disposition creating a clearance rate of approximately 100%.

Hendry County misdemeanor filings increased in 2016 by approximately 18% and a 15% decrease was experienced in criminal traffic filings. A decrease of 2,070 cases or 28% was experienced in Civil Traffic filings. 90% of Civil Traffic were disposed of in 2016.

**The Misdemeanor Pretrial Diversion Program had a 88% successful completion rate for 2016.**



# HENDRY COUNTY CIVIL DIVISION OVERVIEW



**225** approximate number of cases the Family Court Program is case managing. This does not include Department of Revenue Child Support Cases.

## Family Court Program

The Hendry County Family Court Program assists the Circuit Court by case managing and scheduling dissolutions of marriage, name changes, custody, paternity, child support, and other family law related cases. The Hendry County Family Court Program also provides support to the General Magistrate, Darrell Hill.

**367**

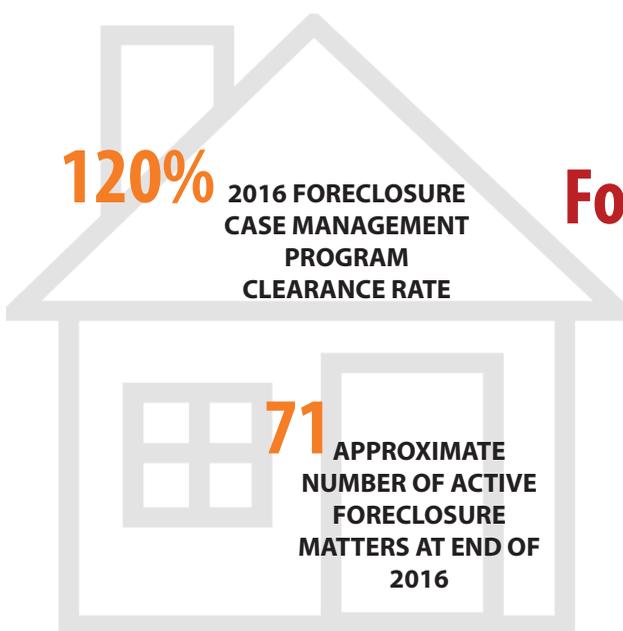
Domestic Relation cases were filed not including child support cases in 2106.



**96%**



clearance rate in 2016.



## Foreclosure Case Management

The Hendry County Foreclosure Case Management Program diligently works to reduce the number of pending foreclosure cases, with the main focus being on cases 18 months and older. These cases are heard by a Senior Judge every other month. The Foreclosure Case Manager assisted the Clerk's Office in addressing back logged civil cases pending within the Circuit Court. She has assisted in closing an additional 27 civil cases, while effectively utilizing Senior Judge time.

## Small Claims Mediation

In 2015, the Hendry County Court began offering a dispute resolution option for small claims cases. The Mediation Program affords all parties the opportunity to reach an agreement without a trial. The Hendry Small Claims Mediation Program currently has two Florida Supreme Court Certified Volunteer County Court Mediators that assist in resolving disputes free of charge.

**181**

SMALL CLAIMS CASES WERE FILED IN 2016

**23**

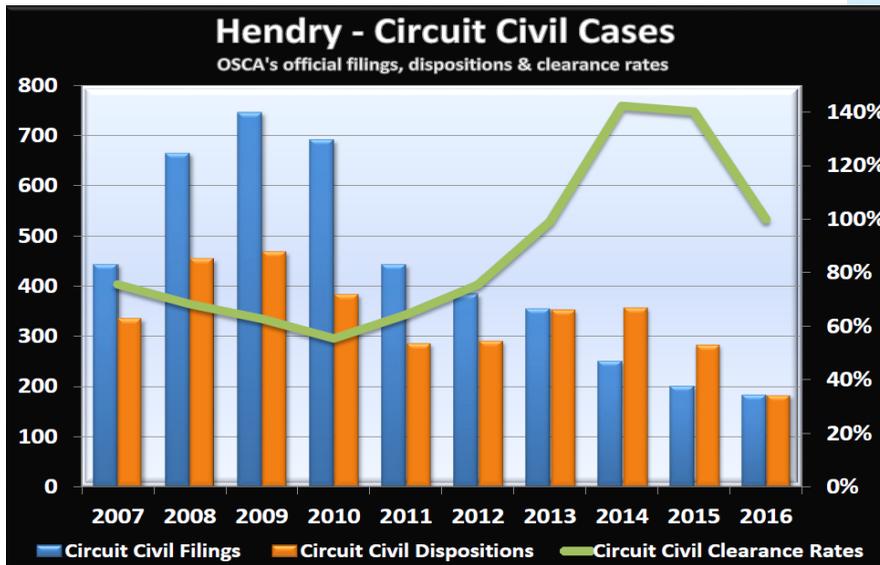
mediation was provided

**19**

resolved prior to trial

# HENDRY COUNTY

## OVERVIEW OF CIVIL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



### 2016 Statistics

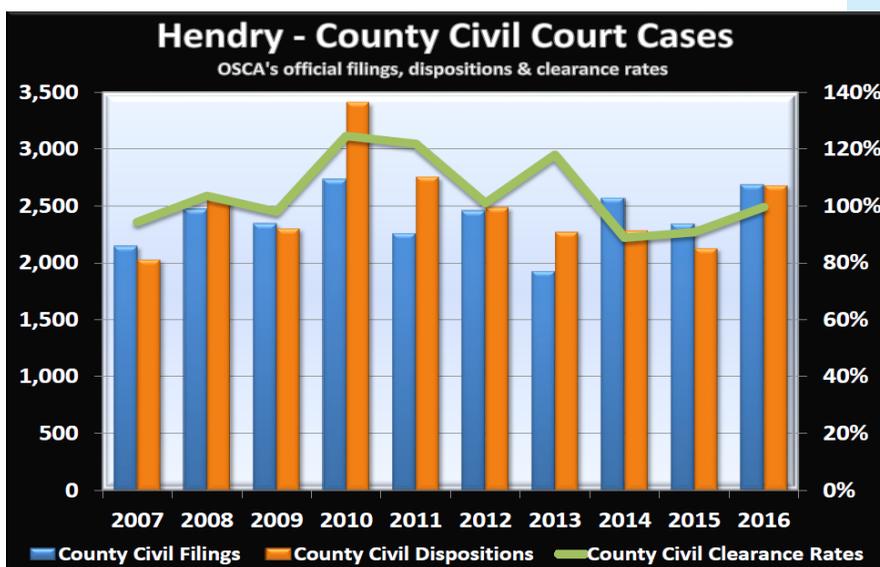
182

Circuit Civil cases filed through June 2016 in Hendry County

On Feb. 7, 2017, the OSCA released its official, audited caseload report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2016. These audited filings reveal that Hendry County's overall circuit-court filings increased by 5% over the prior twelve-month period. This overall increase in circuit-court filings was driven by a 19% spike in felony filings followed by the unified-family division that rose by 0.5%. Probate filings experienced a 10% drop over the last twelve months, while still down 7% when compared to FY2011-12. During FY2015-16, Hendry's audited, county-court filings increased by 3%. County-civil filings experienced changes with a 14.7% increase, while county-criminal filings, in contrast, declined by 8.2% over the prior 12 months.

107.1%

Circuit Civil case clearance rate though June 2016 in Hendry County



2,678

County Civil cases disposed of through June 2016 in Hendry County

# GLADES COUNTY CRIMINAL OVERVIEW

## Probation and Pretrial Department

The Glades County Probation Department pursuant to Florida Statute § 948.08, and § 948.15 provides services to offenders adjudicated of misdemeanors who are ordered to comply with conditions of probation. In October 2014, the Administrative Office of the Courts began aligning the Glades County Probation Department with the operational standards of the other probation departments within the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. The Glades County Probation Department also provides supervision for defendants ordered to comply with pretrial diversion a deferred prosecution option offered by the court.

IN 2016...

**156**  
new probation  
referrals



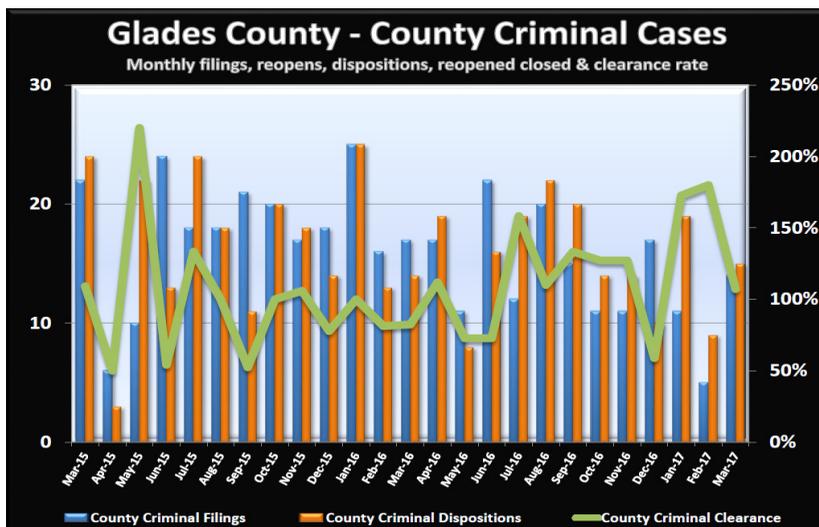
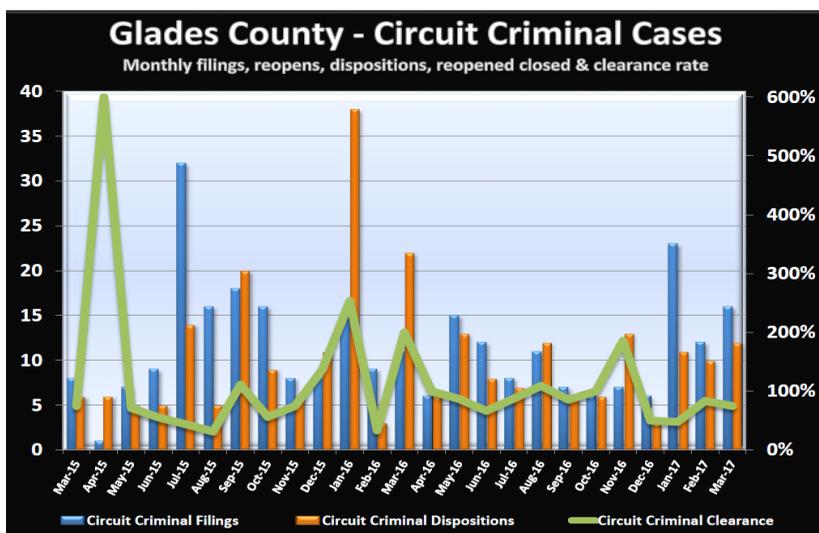
**94%** probation  
compliance  
rate



**42**  
warrants were  
filed by the  
Probation Dept.



## CRIMINAL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



## Calendar Year 2016 Statistics

**196** Criminal Felony Cases filed in  
Glades County

Criminal Felony Cases brought  
to disposition **212**

**108%** clearance rate

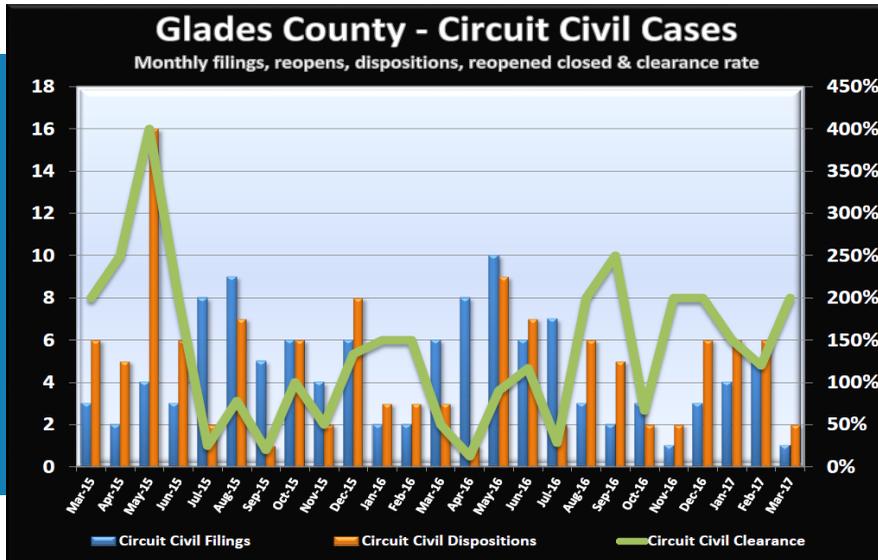
**388** misdemeanor and  
criminal traffic cases filed

cases brought to disposition **386**

**99%** clearance rate

# GLADES COUNTY

## CIVIL CASE FILINGS, DISPOSITION & CLEARANCE RATES



# 184

Circuit Civil cases filed in  
Glades County in  
2016

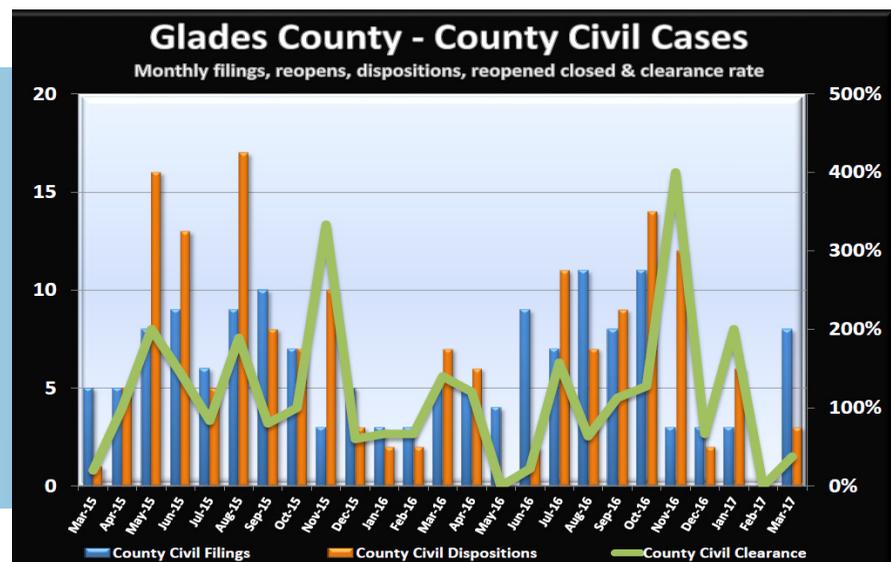
On Feb. 7, 2017, the OSCA released its official, audited caseload report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2016. These audited filings reveal that Glades County's overall circuit-court filings increased by 37% over the prior twelve-month period. This overall increase in circuit court filings was driven by an 80% spike in the circuit-civil division and a 52% jump in the felony division. Unified-family filings also experienced increases over the last twelve months (up 30%).

During FY2015-16, Glades' overall performance in circuit-court case dispositions improved by 18%. Over the past year, the number of dispositions in Glades' county-court decreased by 10%. This decline was led by a 10% decrease in the county civil division as well as county-criminal's decline of 10% since last year.

In FY2015-16, Glades County experienced predominately positive clearance rates in circuit-court with an overall decline of 14%.

# 83

Small Claims cases filed  
in Glades County in  
2016



# 20TH CIRCUIT HIGHLIGHTS

## LEE COUNTY CRIMINAL DIVISION RECEIVES DUAL ACCREDITATION

Lee County's Probation has become one of the first probation departments to receive accreditation status in the state. The county's Criminal Division was reviewed by the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission on Tuesday, June 20th, 2017 at the FLA-PAC Conference in Orlando, FL. The Commission unanimously approved the division for accreditation and also commended them for being a model organization. This was Pretrial Services' third re-accreditation and County Probation's first accreditation.

The Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission began accrediting pretrial agencies in 2008 and was seen as a means to increase judicial confidence in the use of pretrial release programs by providing standardized, accurate information for release/detention decisions. Probation standards were added in 2016. Accreditation covers eight sections: Personnel Practices, Organization and Management, General Safety, Communication and Conduct, Reporting, Investigations, First Appearance and Jail Management, Release and Supervision and Probation Monitoring.

In 2016, there were approximately 5,627 individuals ordered on probation. The average success rate is approximately 62%. Success rate is defined as satisfactorily complying with all conditions set forth by the court. During fiscal year 2015-2016, there were approximately 2,800 defendants placed on Pretrial Supervision. The average success rate is approximately 80%. Monitoring may take the form of home contacts, drug testing, making sure the probationer attends counseling sessions and helping to find suitable housing and employment. Officers also supervise probationers using electronic monitoring equipment which requires expert knowledge of newer technologies while reducing costs to the tax payers.

"As I have known for a very long time, our Criminal Division staff is a professional body of persons all seeking to be accountable for complying with the highest standards of excellence within the Pretrial Services / Probation industry, as well as being transparent for all stakeholders, justice partners, local community leaders and citizens to view how our "practice meets policy," said Trial Court Administrator Scott Wilsker.

Lee County celebrated our Pretrial and Probation Departments during the week of July 16 through the 22nd. Commissioners signed a resolution naming it Pretrial, Probation and Parole Supervision Week.



# LEE COUNTY JUSTICE CENTER AMPS UP SECURITY



The Court Security Department at the Lee County Justice Center Complex is taking steps to make the Justice Center one of the safest buildings in the county.

Sixty-three HD security cameras were recently installed in the Justice Center Proper (JCP) on the 5th floor and in stairwells. Cameras were placed inside and outside of courtrooms, giving court security officers the ability to surveil the entire floor. Cameras will soon be placed on the 4th floor, as well.

The Justice Center Tower (JCT) has had cameras on each of its 10 levels since it opened in 2008. Adding cameras to the 4th and 5th floors of JCP addresses a longstanding security risk, and improves safety and security conditions for employees, litigants and visitors to the Complex.

In an emergency situation, the idea is to have the ability to follow individuals from the moment they enter the courthouse. Court security officers watch the stairwells, elevators, courtrooms and corridors to quickly detect situations that pose or potentially pose a safety or security risk.

Two facial recognition cameras have also been added to the video surveillance system. This capability allows for immediate identification of persons who may pose a security risk. Persons with this designation have their photo and information maintained in a secure database. When the person passes through the camera view, an alert is activated in the control room and the appropriate notifications are made.

The department plans to continue to use technological advances in physical security systems to enhance its ability to monitor and control public spaces.

# NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY: CHILDREN RECIEVE FOREVER HOMES

In 2016, the Children's Network had 38 children adopted into forever families; 34 of whom participated in one of the four Mass Adoption Finalization Hearings held throughout the 20th Circuit. Adoption finalizations are typically closed hearings, but in November the Children's Network schedules open hearings where all of the adoptive families participate together.

The first Mass Adoption Finalization hearing was held in Hendry County on Thursday, November 17, 2016 in front of Judge James Sloan with three children having finalized adoptions. On Friday, November 18, five more children were adopted into their forever families in Collier County in front of Judge Joe Foster. On Saturday, November 19, Judge Robert Branning finalized adoptions for 19 children into 14 families in Lee County. This included four sets of siblings. Two of these siblings were also in foster care for eight years before their new parents learned about them through the Heart Gallery. The 4th ceremony was held on Tuesday, November 22 in Charlotte County. Judge Leigh Frizzle-Hayes presided over seven adoptions, which included two teens.

For 2016, National Adoption Month focused on the importance of identifying permanent families for thousands of 15–18 year olds in foster care who are currently less likely to be adopted, often because of their age, and who all too often age out of the system without a stable place to call home. Securing lifelong connections for older youth, legally and emotionally, is a critical component of their future achievement and overall well-being. However, talking with youth about adoption or permanency can sometimes be challenging. There was one 16 year old youth adopted in November though 27 of the children waiting for families are in that age range.



## THERAPY DOGS WELCOMED IN DEPENDENCY COURT

A courtroom can be a scary, intimidating place for a child. But the 20th Judicial Circuit Therapy Dog Program hopes to make the experience a little less stressful.



The program is piloted in Lee County court by Circuit Judge Robert Branning and Judge Amy Hawthorne in dependency and Termination of Parental Right proceedings, though not mandated. The Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), and counsel can determine if the therapy dog will help the child with testimony either in front of a judge or otherwise. Once the agency or individual identifies a therapy dog is needed, they contact one of the approved therapy dog providers.

Meetings are then held between the team, which consists of handler and dog, and child to ensure a bond forms and the children become comforted. However, these meetings will not be held without the presence of a judge or magistrate, or a neutral representative such as the Guardian Ad Litem. The therapy dog teams also won't be found in the courtroom, but will meet with children in the waiting rooms adjacent to the courtroom prior to the hearing.

"Very often, the children in this court have gone through some turbulent events, and their world can get a little confusing," said Judge Branning. "Especially, when it means coming to court and potentially testifying."

One of the approved therapy dog providers is the Children's Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida. They have several teams of dogs that range from Dalmatians to Retrievers, which have all passed a skills and aptitude evaluation. Their handlers also have to complete a comprehensive education program. At the end of 2016, the CAC Pet Therapy Program had 21 certified pet partner teams.

"Some kids laugh and play with the dogs, giving them the change to be silly and just be kids. Others like to sit quietly, just talking to the dog and gently petting their fur," said Judge Branning. "The dog is happy to just sit and have the occasional scratch behind the ears."





# 2016 TWENTIETH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT ANNUAL REPORT

LEE COUNTY JUSTICE CENTER  
1700 MONROE STREET  
FORT MYERS, FLORIDA 33901

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