



Voter Guide –Judicial Races November 5th, 2024

Judicial Merit Retention Races

1. Why am I being asked to vote on judges? *Florida law requires Florida Supreme Court justices and appeals court judges to be placed on the ballot in nonpartisan elections every six years so voters can determine whether they should remain on their courts for another six-year term. These are called "merit retention" elections.

2. What do "Yes" and "No" votes mean? *A "Yes" vote means you want the judge or justice to remain on the court for another six-year term. A "No" vote means you want the judge or justice to be removed from the court. The majority of voters decide. If most voters say yes, they can stay in place. If most voters say no, the current governor has to appoint a replacement.

3. Do appeals court judges and Supreme Court justices have opponents? *No. Your vote determines whether each judge or justice should remain on the court. They are not running against opponents or each other. Merit retention elections are nonpartisan. In nonpartisan elections, candidates appear on the ballot without reference to any political party, (e.g. Democrat or Republican). Florida law requires judicial elections to be nonpartisan in order to preserve impartiality.

[*Information provided by the Florida Bar Voters Guide. Click here to continue reading.](#)

Florida Supreme Court Judge Retention

FL Supreme Court Justices decide death penalty appeals and appeals from decisions of the appellate courts; resolve conflicts among appellate courts; and oversee the administration of Florida's court system.

Term: 6 Years

Salary: \$251,414

Click here to view recent Supreme Court Opinions: [Opinion Search For All Appellate Courts - Supreme Court \(flcourts.gov\)](#)

Click here to go to the [Florida Bar Voter Guide](#).

Justice Renatha Francis

Justice Renatha Francis is the 92nd Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. After graduating from law school in Jacksonville, Florida, she clerked at the First District Court of Appeal for 6 ½ years. She joined Shutts & Bowen, LLP, Of Counsel, in Miami-Dade, where she was a member of the Mass Litigation and Class Action Practice Group, representing large corporate clients.

On August 5, 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis appointed Justice Renatha Francis to the Florida Supreme Court. Previously, Governor DeSantis appointed her to the 15th Judicial Circuit Court in Palm Beach County, where she successfully retained her seat for a six-year term in 2022. Justice Francis also served on the Circuit and County Courts in the 11th Judicial Circuit of Miami-Dade from 2017-19 by appointment to each by then-Governor Rick Scott.

Click here to go: [Justice Renatha Francis - Supreme Court \(flcourts.gov\)](#)

Justice Meredith Sasso

On May 23, 2023, Governor Ron DeSantis appointed Justice Meredith L. Sasso to be the 93rd justice of the Supreme Court of Florida.

In August 2016, Justice Sasso joined the Office of the General Counsel to Governor Rick Scott, serving as Chief Deputy General Counsel. In this role, she represented the Governor in litigation before the Florida Supreme Court, the First District Court of Appeal, and state and federal trial courts. In 2019, Governor Rick Scott appointed her to the Fifth District Court of Appeal. Governor Ron DeSantis recommissioned her to the newly created Sixth District Court of Appeal on January 1, 2023, where she was elected by her colleagues to serve as its first Chief Judge. She is a member of the American Enterprise Institute Leadership Network and the Federalist Society.

Click here to go: [Justice Meredith L. Sasso - Supreme Court \(flcourts.gov\)](https://www.flcourts.gov/judges/justice-meredith-l-sasso)

2nd District Court of Appeal - Merit Retention

The purpose of Florida's District Courts of Appeal is to provide the opportunity for thoughtful review of decisions of lower tribunals by multi-judge panels. District Courts of Appeal correct harmful errors and ensure that decisions are consistent with our rights and liberties. This process contributes to the development, clarity, and consistency of the law.

Term: 6 Year

Salary: \$212,562

Click here to see recent 2nd DCA opinions: [Opinion Search For All Appellate Courts - DCA2\(flcourts.gov\)](https://www.flcourts.gov/opinion-search)

Click here to go to the [Florida Bar Voter Guide](#)

Judge Anthony K. Black

Anthony K. Black is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office in 2010. His current term ends on January 7, 2025. In 2002, Judge Black was appointed to the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Court. He was reelected to the circuit court bench in 2004 without opposition where he served until April 2010 when he was appointed to the appellate bench. Judge Black was retained by the electorate in 2012 and 2018. He was appointed by Governor Charlie Crist in April 2010.

Click here to go: <https://2dca.flcourts.gov/Judges/Judge-Anthony-K.-Black>

Judge Edward LaRose

Edward LaRose is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office in 2005. His current term ends on January 7, 2025. LaRose ran for re-election for judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He won in the retention election on November 6, 2018.

Click here to go: <https://2dca.flcourts.gov/Judges/Judge-Edward-C.-LaRose>

Judge Susan Rothstein-Youakim

Susan Rothstein-Youakim is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. Her current term ends on January 7, 2025. In January 1995, Judge Rothstein-Youakim joined the Appellate Division of the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida. In May 2016, Governor Rick Scott appointed Judge Rothstein-Youakim to the Second District Court of Appeal. Rothstein-Youakim ran for re-election for judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. She won in the retention election on November 6, 2018.

Click here to go: <https://2dca.flcourts.gov/Judges/Judge-Susan-H.-Rothstein-Youakim>

Florida 6th Judicial Circuit – Judge Group 14

The Florida Circuit Courts are trial courts of general jurisdiction in Florida. The Circuit Court handles cases involving felonies, family law, civil issues, probate issues, juvenile cases, and appeals from County Court. Florida's 6th Judicial Circuit covers Pinellas and Pasco counties. It includes 45 judges at the circuit level. It is one of 20 judicial circuits in Florida and 94 circuits in the United States. To qualify for the post of circuit judge, a candidate must be an elector of a county within the circuit and must have been admitted to the practice of law in Florida for the preceding five years. Judges are selected via nonpartisan election.

Term: 6 Years

Salary: \$182,060/year

Jennifer Dubbeld



Party: Non Partisan

Biographical Info:

Education J.D- Thomas Cooley Law School, B.A.- University of South Florida

Professional Experience Assistant Public Defender for 17 years; Began legal career at a boutique law firm and title company doing family law, title work, and business/contractual law

Public Service Attorney at the Public Defender's Office, Volunteer Mediator and Arbitrator with the Florida Bar, Board member on the Intervention and Appeals Committee at Madeira Beach Fundamental Middle School, Mentor at Osceola Fundamental High School, Mentor with Lawyers for Literacy

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Do you believe all Florida residents have adequate access to legal help and the legal system? If not, what can or should be done to provide wider and better access?

As an assistant public defender, I am appointed to cases where people cannot afford to retain a private attorney to represent them in criminal court. Everyone has access to a lawyer in the criminal court system, and I have not seen any issues with the courts refusing to appoint a public defender to an individual charged with a crime and potentially facing jail or prison. With regards to other aspects of the law, the clerk of court does a fantastic job providing required forms and guides online to help those that can't afford an attorney.

As an attorney, have you tried cases in front of a judge and jury? How many and what types of cases? I have tried many cases in front of a judge and jury. I have tried 48 cases, and this number is likely higher (I didn't start keeping track of my trials until well into my career), and of those cases, I have 32 jury trials and 16 bench trials. I have tried many complex cases. I have tried multiple Capital Sexual Battery cases, L & L Molestation, Attempted Murder, Aggravated Assault, Trafficking in Drugs, Possession of various drugs, DUI's, Improper Exhibition of a Firearm, Trespass and more

Have you ever had to support a legal position that was contrary to your personal moral belief? If yes, please explain in detail.

Not that I can think of. I firmly believe in the Constitution, and I am proud to take a stand daily to protect our Constitution and individual rights.

Many criminal defendants are poor, and as a result they find themselves represented by public defenders. Public defenders in turn find themselves with significant caseloads. What can a judge do to ensure that such a situation doesn't lead to inadequate representation?

Considering the fact that I am a public defender with a high caseload, I know that it is VERY important to be organized and efficient with my time each day. It is important for judges to understand the difficulty each public defender faces daily, and by listening to the public defender's request in court and working with them with scheduling hearings, motions and trials, this assists to ensure adequate representation.

What changes can the court system make to better approach issues with respect to juvenile offenders?

I think that it is important to take the time with each juvenile offender when they first come into the juvenile court system and take a hard look at what lead them to the point where they are. Stopping juvenile offenders when they first enter into the court system should be the main goal. Once juveniles are repeat offenders in the juvenile court system, they are much more likely to become criminals in the adult system.

Do you have any current conflicts of interest, and are you willing to acknowledge that if you have any cases that would create a conflict, you would immediately recuse.

As an assistant public defender, I don't get to pick my cases. I look at each case objectively, and I never allow for my personal feelings or beliefs to interfere with the legal advice that I provide to my clients. There isn't any type of case that I would have a conflict with, however, if a conflict arose, I would immediately recuse myself.

Nick Fiorentino



Party: Non Partisan

Biographical Info:

Education Juris Doctor Degree from Stetson College of Law, BA from the University of South Florida, AA from St. Petersburg College

Professional Experience I am the managing partner at Ciarcigliano, Gell & Fiorentino, P.A. I practice in the areas of Family, Probate, Civil and Criminal Law. I am also a Florida Supreme Court Mediator, a Qualified Parent Coordinator, and an Arbitrator. I have been a critical incident attorney for local law enforcement for the past 18 year.

Public Service I am a member of the Seminole Lake Rotary Club, I have been the secretary of the club for the past 2 years and am about to start my third year. I am also on the Rotary District Finance Committee. I serve on the board of Hero to a Child formerly known as the Guardian Ad Litem Foundation. I serve on the IAC Committee at a Madeira Beach Fundamental.

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Do you believe all Florida residents have adequate access to legal help and the legal system? If not, what can or should be done to provide wider and better access?

I believe that the biggest hurdle to adequate legal access is the available financial resources of a party. All parts of the process cost money whether it is to hire an attorney, to request records, or to hire experts. We have wonderful legal aid organizations in our circuit to assist with this, however, they are limited in what they can provide. To provide better access, we need more attorneys to give of their time to do pro bono work. I have done this throughout my career and believe if more attorneys are willing to provide pro bono services more citizens would have access.

As an attorney, have you tried cases in front of a judge and jury? How many and what types of cases?

Yes, I have tried approximately 35 cases where I have been the lead attorney. I have tried family, civil, administrative and domestic violence injunctions cases. Because the majority of my practice has been in family law, we many times need to be involved in temporary relief hearings, these are mini trials but do not count in a trial count. However, they are just as important as trials as you are calling witnesses, presenting evidence and asking the court to make a decision.

Have you ever had to support a legal position that was contrary to your personal moral belief? If yes, please explain in detail.

Yes, as an attorney you need to present your client's case which may not always be in line with what you believe, however, if the law is on their side, you have an obligation. As with being a judge, you will need to apply laws that you may not agree with, however, to do the job properly you must apply the law fairly and consistently with how it is written. I have had cases especially in family law where I did not agree with how a client wanted to proceed as it was not in the best interests of the child and after counseling my client they did not agree, I have withdrawn from the matter.

Many criminal defendants are poor, and as a result they find themselves represented by public defenders. Public defenders in turn find themselves with significant caseloads. What can a judge do to ensure that such a situation doesn't lead to inadequate representation?

We have some very good public defenders and I think it is very important for judges assigned to the criminal bench to not only run their calendars, but be mindful of the attorneys appearing before them on both the Public Defender and the State Attorney side. Usually these are newer attorneys and they may need guidance and mentoring from the court and other more experienced attorneys. I think it is important for the Judge to be a monitor to make sure everyone is being adequately represented.

What changes can the court system make to better approach issues with respect to juvenile offenders?

When I was chair of the Marital and Family Law Section of the St. Petersburg Bar Association, we held a conference on Adverse Childhood Experiences. This conference focused on the effects of childhood trauma and how it effects children throughout their life. I believe there needs to be more focus on prevention and treatment of childhood trauma to help prevent children from becoming offenders. As the system focuses more on childhood trauma, I am hopeful that we will have less juvenile offenders.

Do you have any current conflicts of interest, and are you willing to acknowledge that if you have any cases that would create a conflict, you would immediately recuse.

I do not believe I have any current conflicts of interest, however, if any become apparent to me or are ever raised, I would recuse myself from those matters pursuant to the Rules of Judicial Administration and the Judicial Canons. It is imperative that everyone is treated respectfully, fairly, and impartially when they appear in court.