

The 17th Circuit Collective

December 2025





Chief Judge

Carol-Lisa Phillips Speaks Out:

Thank you to everyone for your exceptional hard work throughout 2025.

The commitment and dedication demonstrated by all staff and colleagues this year has been tremendous.

I also want to extend my best wishes to everyone for a safe and joyous holiday season and express my optimism and anticipation for a great new year ahead for the 17th Judicial Circuit.

~ Carol-Lisa Phillips



A Message From Trial Court Administrator

Joe D'Amico:

As we near the end of another calendar year, I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for the hard work and dedication everyone does to move our Circuit forward.

This past year marked the inaugural year of our court administration employee milestone ceremonies. Since January, we celebrated members of our court administration team that have had continuous service with the Circuit for 5, 10, 15, 20 and more than 25 years. It is inspiring to see these collective milestone achievements across the organization, and we look forward to celebrating many more for years to come.

Consistent with our plan to promote health and wellness, we also continued our monthly step challenge, although participation has dwindled slightly in the final months of 2025. In an effort to drum up increased participation, in January we will be adding other rewards for those who participate. It is never too late to start, and all you need to do is count your steps using your smartphone, smartwatch or other device, and submit your results to Claudette each month.

I recently shared an update regarding the interior demolition of the old courthouse, and during a recent meeting with County Administration officials, the Chief Judge and I reiterated the importance of clear communication so that we can keep everyone in the building apprised as demolition efforts continue. We will continue to share these important updates with you as we receive them.

I hope you all have had a healthy and happy holiday season thus far. I wish everyone a most prosperous new year.

~ Joe D'Amico



Breaking News:



JUDGE JONATHAN D. LOTT APPOINTED TO FOURTH DCA

Judge Jonathan D. Lott is heading to
West Palm Beach!

Congratulations on your appointment
to the 4th DCA!

Governor Ron DeSantis appointed
Judge Lott to the 4th DCA on October
30th, the first such appointment from
the 17th Judicial Circuit since Judge
Dorian Damoorgian was appointed in
2008.

Good luck in this amazing
accomplishment! You will be missed!

[Read our
Press Release
HERE](#)



BEST OF LUCK!



Breaking News:



THE APPOINTMENT & INVESTITURE OF JUDGE MARLON J. WEISS



Read our
Press Release
[HERE](#)



May marked the addition of Judge Marlon J. Weiss to the 17th Judicial Circuit. Judge Weiss was appointed by Governor Ron DeSantis in May to fill the vacancy created by the May 1, 2025 retirement of Chief Judge Jack Tuter.

Judge Weiss previously served as a criminal appellate attorney in the Florida Attorney General's Office and is a board-certified lawyer. Earlier in his career, he clerked for the U.S. District Court for District Judge Jose Martinez and Magistrate Barry Seltzer.

He is currently assigned to the Family Division.

WELCOME ABOARD!



Community Court = Compassion & Caring



Pompano, Fort Lauderdale & Hollywood Community Courts Change Lives

Helping the unhoused access services and overcome obstacles is what Community Court is all about.

meaning of care and compassion by providing solutions that change lives and offer hope.

Our three Community Courts - in Fort Lauderdale, Pompano Beach and Hollywood - take on low-level misdemeanor cases and municipal ordinance violations by offering innovative alternatives like community service, mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment.

Judge Florence Taylor Barner presides in Fort Lauderdale Community Court, **Judge Betsy Benson** presides in Pompano Beach, and **Judge Corey A. Cawthon** presides in Hollywood.

Keep up the amazing work! Community Court provides options that pave the road to long-term success!

These courts have redefined the





The Hottest Ticket in Town



Interested in scheduling a tour of the Broward County Courthouse? Get in line! Our courthouse tours have become such a hot ticket that we're fully booked every week through June 2026 – with some schools already reserving dates into 2027. And there's a waiting list of 12 schools eager to participate.

It's all because of YOU – the judges and Court Administration staff who take the time to engage with students and bring the justice system to life.

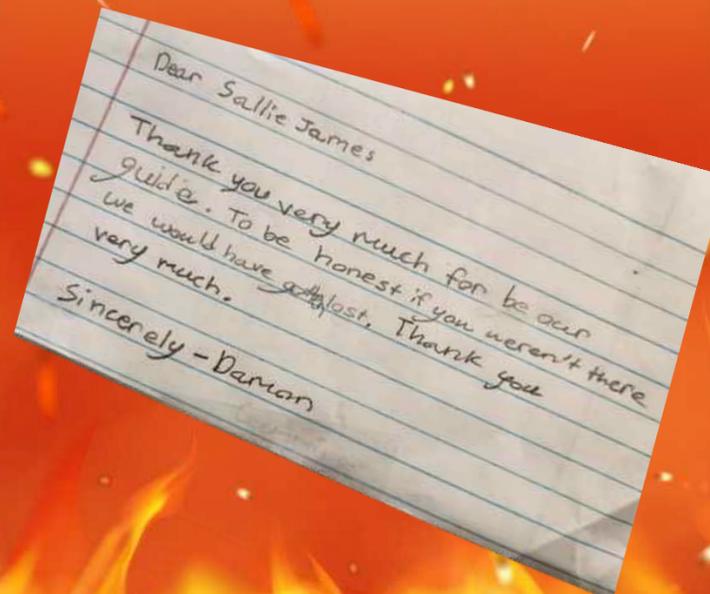
During these visits, students observe live court hearings, learn about problem-solving courts, step inside a holding cell, and sometimes even don a judge's robe and take a turn with the gavel. Presentations from Court Reporting, the State Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, and – most recently – the BSO Crime Lab make the experience even more dynamic.

After all, where else can a student pepper a judge with questions, watch a court interpreter translate in real time, and see firsthand how choices have consequences as in-custody juveniles are led into court? Or get a crash court in DNA, latent fingerprints or ballistics?

Our courthouse has become a sizzling-hot classroom distinguished by your personal contributions. **THANK YOU!**

In the past year alone, more than 1,200 students have toured the courthouse – a number that could easily double if time allowed.

THANK YOU to everyone who helps make these courthouse tours such a powerful and popular way to show our community what justice looks like in action!



From the Courtroom to the Crime Lab ...



JEOPARDY!



Judicial Accountability	Balance of Power	Judicial Selection Process	Bonus Please!
<u>\$250</u>	<u>\$250</u>	<u>\$250</u>	<u>\$250</u>
<u>\$500</u>	<u>\$500</u>	<u>\$500</u>	<u>\$500</u>
<u>\$750</u>	<u>\$750</u>	<u>\$750</u>	<u>\$750</u>
<u>\$1000</u>	<u>\$1000</u>	<u>\$1000</u>	<u>\$1000</u>



Judges, Jeopardy! and the Informed Voters Project

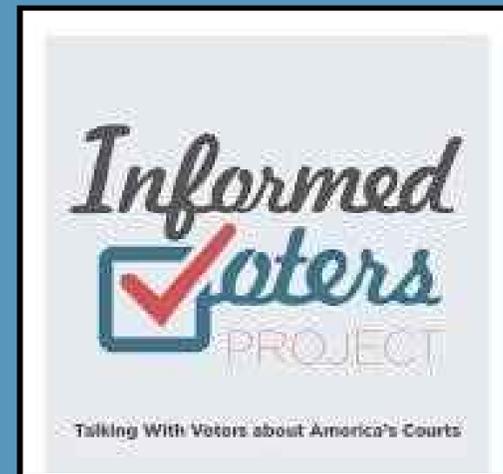
Students from Hallandale High School, Nova Middle and High Schools, and Millennium 6-12 took part in the Informed Voters Project, a collaboration between the 17th Judicial Circuit, the Broward County Supervisor of Elections, and Broward County Public Schools.

They learned about the judicial system, the importance of voting, and the process of becoming a judge through presentations by judges, an attorney, and representatives from the Supervisor of Elections' Office, then tested their knowledge in a lively game of Jeopardy!

Participating judges included Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips, Judge Giuseppina Miranda, Judge Florence Taylor Barner, Judge Jose Izquierdo, Judge Michael Robinson, Judge Stacey Schulman, and Judge Natasha DePrimo.

And the Category is

JEEPARDY!





THE 17TH
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT!
Welcomes
JUDGE PASCALE ACHILLE

The 17TH Judicial Circuit has a new judge! Meet Judge Pascale Achille, who worked 12 years as an Assistant State Attorney for the Broward State Attorney's Office. Judge Achille will be sworn in on Dec. 30th.

Read Our
Press Release
HERE



Welcome Denise Kistner, Our Newest Magistrate!

Enjoy Your Retirement, Magistrate Vicki Plant



**Magistrate
Vicki Plant**



**Magistrate
Denise Kistner**

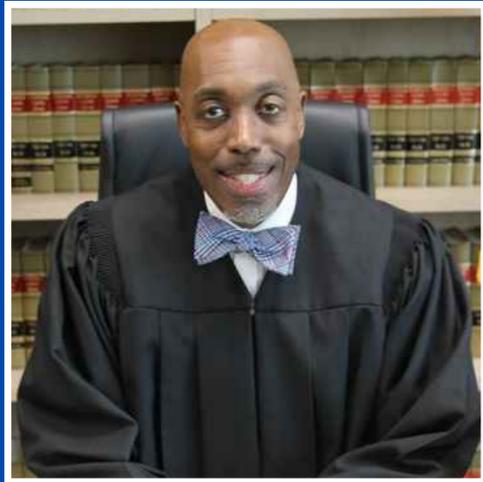
Greetings and Goodbyes

The 17th Judicial Circuit is delighted to introduce our newest Magistrate: Denise Kistner, who officially took the bench on November 10th. Magistrate Kistner is a graduate of St. Thomas University of Law and ran her own law firm prior to taking the bench .

Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips swore Magistrate Kistner in before her family and other well-wishers. Her mother, husband and son attended the ceremony in person, while her daughter joined via video call from Tampa, where she's earning her master's degree at the University of South Florida.

Magistrate Kistner fills the vacancy left by Magistrate Vicki Plant, who retired in November after 15 years. Magistrate Plant is moving to the mountains of northern Georgia where she plans to kayak, hike and enjoy the outdoors! We will miss you Magistrate Plant. Best wishes in your retirement.

Judge Keathan B. Frink: Fourth DCA Representative to Florida Conference of Circuit Court Judges



Congratulations to Judge Keathan B. Frink, who was elected by his peers to serve as the 4th DCA representative to the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges.

This prestigious honor not only reflects Judge Frink's leadership and dedication, but also underscores the 17th Judicial Circuit's reputation for judicial excellence, influence, and commitment to advancing the profession statewide.

Amazing honor!



Judge Ari Abraham Porth Receives Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy Annual Award



Judge Ari Abraham Porth in October was named recipient of the Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy Annual Award, an honor bestowed on a member of the legal community who exemplifies the moral principles espoused by Saint Thomas More.

More – a judge, statesman, and humanitarian – was canonized a saint in 1535 by the Roman Catholic Church.

Judge Porth presides in Felony Mental Health Court, one of the 17th Judicial Circuit's problem-solving courts. He is a former assistant state attorney and state legislator. He was sworn in to the Circuit Court in 2013.

Congratulations Judge Porth, we are lucky to have you on our team!

**Read Our
Press Release
HERE**



Click the links above to read our press releases!

Judges Powell and Eves Receive Top Honors at Statewide Conference



**Judge Jackie
Powell**



Judge Tabitha Eves

**[Read Our
Press Release
HERE](#)**



County Court Judge Jackie Powell was elected Vice President of the Fourth District Court of Appeal (DCA) and County Court Judge Tabitha B. Eves was named President-Elect of the Stephen R. Booher American Inn of Court, a prestigious organization focused on promoting professionalism, ethics and legal excellence within the bench and bar.

The two County Court judges were recognized during the 2025 Conference of County Court Judges of Florida, held in July in Bonita Springs.

Judge Powell will serve a one-year term on the Conference's Executive Committee, which is dedicated to advancing the administration of justice and supporting continuing judicial education for County Court judges statewide.

Congratulations Judges Powell and Eves!

Click the links above to read our press releases!

Judge Lauren M. Alperstein: Tzedek Award for Commitment to Justice



Congratulations to Judge Lauren M. Alperstein, who was named the recipient of the Tzedek Award in honor of her steadfast commitment to justice. The Jewish Bar Association presented the award on May 29, 2025, in observance of Jewish American Heritage Month.

The Tzedek Award is presented to individuals who exemplify the principles of justice and equality, making this recognition especially meaningful. During the event, held at the 110 Tower in Fort Lauderdale, Broward County Commissioner Nan H. Rich also presented Judge Alperstein with an official proclamation declaring May 29th as “Judge Lauren Alperstein Appreciation Day” in Broward County.

Amazing honor, Judge Lauren M. Alperstein. We are so proud of you!

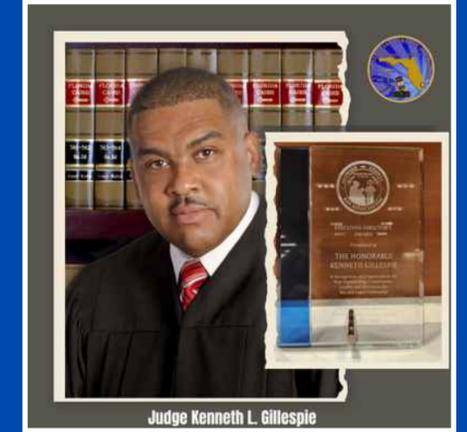
[Read Our Press Release HERE](#)



Judges Jeffrey Levenson and Kenneth Gillespie Honored at BCBA Gala



Judge Jeffrey R. Levenson



Judge Kenneth L. Gillespie

Judge Levenson received the prestigious Stephen R. Booher Award, presented in recognition of his humanity, integrity, and dedication to the Bench, Bar, and community.

Judge Gillespie was honored with the Executive Director’s Award, acknowledging his outstanding commitment, loyalty, and service to the Bar and legal community.

Congratulations Judges on these honors!

[Read Our Press Release HERE](#)



Click the links above to read our press releases!



**Broward County
Bar Association**

FLORENDA PATRIOT



Congratulations to Judge John D. Fry on being named recipient of The Florida Patriot award, which honors legal leader veterans' service to country and community.

The award was presented by the Broward County Bar Association.

Judge Fry is a former Marine who presides over county misdemeanor mental health court.

The 17th Judicial Circuit is fortunate to have such rock stars on our team!



[Read Our
Press Release
HERE](#)



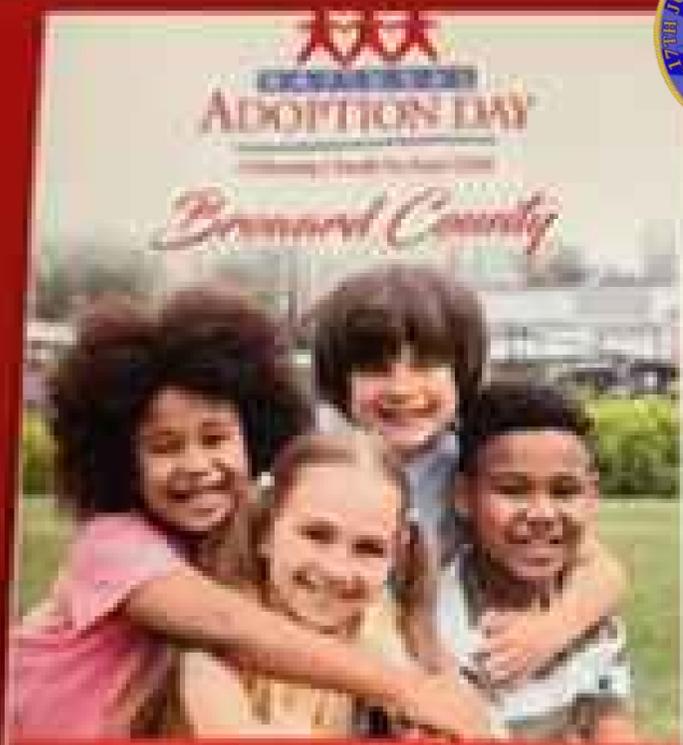
National Adoption Day!

National Adoption Day at the Broward County Courthouse on Nov. 22 was a spectacular celebration overflowing with joyful tears, big smiles, and plenty of laughter.

A heartfelt thank-you to Judge John B. Bowman, who has made it his mission to meticulously plan this special day year after year. Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips led the opening ceremony, and Judges Jose Izquierdo, Yael Gamm, Stacy Schulman, and Judge Bowman finalized 16 adoptions — creating forever homes for wonderful children and unforgettable memories for their families.

The event was a delightful celebration featuring a clown doing face painting, a robot-themed photo booth, video games, puppies to pet, therapy dogs, and plenty of cake, cupcakes, candy, and sandwiches. Volunteers had wrapped gifts for the newly adopted children, working hard to make the day feel extra special. One attendee called it “the best day ever in the courthouse,” and by all accounts, it truly was.





SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2025



Horsing Around



Judge Ari Abraham Porth's Felony Mental Health court was the place to be on Nov. 13th when a miniature horse in a judicial robe and wig clomped into court and stole the show.

Pegasus The Therapy Horse walked into a standing room-only courtroom where every smart phone in the room was trained on his furry face. He proceeded to make friends, pose for pictures and melt hearts.

His visit, done in collaboration with Meraki Behavioral Health, highlighted the benefit of equine therapy in promoting emotional regulation, trust building and stress reduction.

Pegasus is owned by Alexandra Ramos who collaborates with Lindsay Wallick, Meraki's founder and president.

The special event was featured on WSVN and CBS Miami while photos and video clips of the visit permeated social media!

A great way to showcase how our problem-solving courts use innovation to help others!





Meet Pegasus!





17th Circuit Memories



Holiday Memories



My FAVORITE Color is CHRISTMAS Lights





JUDGES & JUDICIAL ASSISTANTS





**“THANK YOU”
FROM COURT
ADMINISTRATION**
Let's go all out in 2026!

Thank You

For Your Attention

17th Judicial Circuit