

17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF
FLORIDA
BROWARD COUNTY COURTHOUSE
201 S.E. 6TH STREET, SUITE 20170
FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33301



TRIAL COURT
ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE
SALLIE JAMES, PUBLIC
INFORMATION OFFICER
(954) 831-7559
SJAMES@17TH.FLCOURTS.ORG

For Immediate Release

For Immediate Release

January 7, 2026

New Program Helps Family Court Judges Connect Families to Critical Services

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL – The 17th Judicial Circuit Court of Florida is pleased to announce the launch of its **Family Court Services Pilot Program**, a county-funded initiative designed to connect individuals involved in family litigation with appropriate therapeutic resources while also ensuring compliance with court orders.

The program was created to improve conflict resolution and provide support services to families, with particular sensitivity to the needs of children. Court Administration personnel assigned to the unit will assist litigants by providing referrals to community agencies or private providers for services such as counseling, parenting classes, substance abuse evaluation and treatment, and social investigations, among others.

“It’s a great way to start the New Year,” said Judge Lauren M. Alperstein, who was instrumental in development of the program. “It’s amazing. It fills a huge void in the sense that we never had resources available in the courthouse. We will actually have people in the courthouse who will be finding the support these families need and reporting back to the court. This is what the Florida Supreme Court envisions to help promote therapeutic justice.”

The program’s primary goal is to assist families faster and more efficiently. The services will be available to eight family court judges and five magistrates.

“The program’s employees are going to be filling gaps,” said Family Court Services Manager Diane St. Amand-Scott. “For example, we will be connecting a parent with a therapist if that is what the judge wants. Our employees will be the eyes and ears of the court.”

Chief Judge Carol-Lisa Phillips said the program has been a long time in the making.

“It’s a big positive,” Judge Phillips added.

The Family Court Services Pilot Program staff currently includes:

- **Family Court Services Manager** – Identifies and vets community programs that provide critical family services.

- **Judicial Navigator** – Manages complex casework, with a focus on referring families to appropriate service providers based on court orders.

- **Judicial Support Investigator** – Provides the court with evaluative information in proceedings involving custody and visitation disputes.

- **Administrative Assistant** – Handles administrative and clerical support for the Family Court Services unit.

“We were like a MASH unit putting band aids on these families without any way to really follow through and see if they were actually getting the services they needed,” Judge Alperstein noted.

“Now we have a unit to direct these people to the services they need.”

Said Trial Court Administrator Joe D’Amico: "We are extremely excited about our new Family Court Services unit and the benefits it will provide to the judiciary and families. This initiative is the result of months-long collective efforts amongst Court Administration staff and judges, and certainly would not be possible without the funding support from Broward County. We are thankful for and continually appreciative of the support we receive from the County."

ABOUT THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

The Seventeenth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida is the court for Broward County, headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, FL. It is the second largest circuit court in the state. Broward County has 90 judges. Of those, 32 are county court judges and 58 are circuit judges. Four courthouses comprise the 17th circuit and include the Broward County Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale, and three satellite courthouses: the North Regional Courthouse in Deerfield Beach, the West Regional Courthouse in Plantation and the South Regional Courthouse in Hollywood.