



Supreme Court of Florida

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Contact: Craig Waters, Director of Public Information

Florida Supreme Court

(850) 414-7641

Workgroup to focus on increasing public safety in Florida's courthouses

TALLAHASSEE – Thousands of our citizens seek justice and the peaceful resolution of disputes within the walls of Florida's courthouses each day. The safety of our courts is all the greater when people see violence erupt in their own streets and communities as they have this summer, Florida Chief Justice Jorge Labarga said Monday, when he announced a new workgroup to study local courthouse security.

"Every day in Florida's courthouses, people are living through heartbreaking dilemmas in both criminal and civil cases," Labarga said. "We must do everything in our power to make sure that these buildings remain safe and secure and that the troubles we hope to resolve are not compounded by acts of violence in the very place reserved for justice. It is key to our freedoms as Americans."

Labarga will issue orders creating the **Trial Courthouse Security Workgroup**. It will work under the auspices of the Court's [Judicial Management Council](#) (JMC), a group that advises the chief justice and the Supreme Court on long-range issues confronting Florida's judiciary.

Four of the members of the workgroup are also members of the Judicial Management Council, including Circuit Judge [Margaret Steinbeck](#), who serves in the 20th judicial circuit in **Fort Myers** and who will chair the workgroup.

Early in her legal career Steinbeck served as a JAG officer in the Army, moving into the Reserves after twelve years of active duty and reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel before retiring in 2008.

"Military service showed me that basic security is the floor that must be laid before we can begin to address these loftier questions of justice," Steinbeck said. "Thousands of people work in Florida's courthouses and many thousands more come to them every day. Keeping everyone safe is paramount, and the members of this workgroup will be focused on making sure that everything that can be done to ensure safety is being done."

The other appointees include judges from **Miami, Orlando, Jacksonville, Tampa, Tallahassee, Pensacola** and **Sanford** and attorneys from **Jacksonville** and **Tallahassee**. Each has agreed to serve for two years. Chief Justice Labarga expressed the Supreme Court's gratitude to each for their enthusiasm about the issue and their willingness to serve.

A list of appointees is attached.

"We want to move ahead quickly on this issue – and stay ahead," Labarga said. "There can be no question of its urgency. It is underscored by the shock, fear, and grief we all have witnessed and experienced this long summer."

As the pathfinder of the judicial branch, the JMC began discussing the likelihood of a security workgroup in early 2016 after the release of Florida's new long-range [strategic plan](#). One long-range goal addresses increasing protection of all judges, court personnel, court users, and facilities. It stresses effective security, emergency preparedness, and continuity of operations plans.

"The workgroup will help advance the mission of the judicial branch and increase current levels of safety for all those who use our courthouses, from Pensacola to Key West," Labarga said

The mission of Florida's judiciary is "to protect rights and liberties, uphold and interpret the law and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes."

The charge given to the workgroup outlines several responsibilities, including the following:

- evaluate security procedures, practices and perceptions at Florida's courthouses;
- review national courthouse security procedures and consult with professionals and experts on model practices so as to provide the Florida Supreme Court with an evaluation of local security plans;
- identify important elements of security in trial court facilities;
- develop standards, model procedures and recommendations for appropriate training;
- jointly review security funding practices with the courts, the counties, and the sheriffs to evaluate the appropriateness of the funds used;
- propose criteria to establish a statewide reporting system for security incidents; and
- identify effective partnerships and opportunities for partnership in providing and promoting security in courthouses and establish dialogues among local governments, law enforcement and the judiciary.

Cooperation with local governments is crucial here because, under the Florida Constitution, counties bear the responsibility of funding courthouses and local court security rather than state government. Both the courts and the counties must jointly examine security policies and procedures to make sure best practices are in place to safeguard the judicial process and the people it serves.

Labarga also plans direct outreach to county governments, including personal visits to local county commissioners and sheriffs wherever needed to advance these goals.

Local judges and court officials in all 20 of Florida's circuit courts are working with Labarga on this issue and may follow up with their own local press releases in the months ahead. Reporters should feel free to contact them for comment.

For more information about Florida's court system and the long-range plan, please visit www.flcourts.org or to learn about the Florida Supreme Court, www.floridasupremecourt.org.

Judicial Management Council Trial Court Security Workgroup Members

The Honorable Margaret Steinbeck, Chair Circuit Judge, 20th Judicial Circuit 1700 Monroe Street Fort Myers, FL 33901	The Honorable Jonathan Sjostrom Chief Judge, 2nd Judicial Circuit 301 S. Monroe St. 301-E Tallahassee, FL 32301
The Honorable Richard J. Suarez Chief Judge, Third District Court of Appeal 2001 SW 117 th Avenue Miami, FL 33175	The Honorable Mark H. Mahon Chief Judge, 4th Judicial Circuit 501 West Adams St. Jacksonville, FL 32202
Thomas S. Edwards, Jr., J.D. Edwards and Ragatz, P.A. 501 Riverside Avenue, Suite 601 Jacksonville, FL 32202	The Honorable Bertila Soto Chief Judge, 11th Judicial Circuit 175 N.W. 1 st Avenue Miami, FL 33128
Steven M. Seibert, Esq. 8048 Evening Star Lane Tallahassee, FL 32312	The Honorable Ronald Ficarrotta Chief Judge, 13th Judicial Circuit 800 E. Twiggs Street Tampa, FL 33602
The Honorable Frederick Lauten Chief Judge, Ninth Judicial Circuit 425 N. Orange Avenue, Room 2010 Orlando, FL 32801	The Honorable John Galluzzo Chief Judge, 18th Judicial Circuit 301 N. Park Avenue Sanford, FL 32771
The Honorable Linda L. Nobles Chief Judge, First Judicial Circuit 190 Governmental Center Pensacola, FL 32502	Andrew Johns (OSCA Staff) 500 South Duval Street Tallahassee, FL 32399

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