

Judicial Merit Retention Overview

Why am I being asked to vote on judges?

Florida law requires Florida Supreme Court justices and appeals court judges be placed on the ballot in nonpartisan elections every six years so voters can determine whether these justices and judges should remain on their courts for another six-year term. **These are called "merit retention" elections.** This year, five Supreme Court justices and seven appeals court judges for the 4th District Court of Appeals will be on the ballot.

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.

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.

Florida Bar Voter Guide: <https://www.floridabar.org/public/faircts/votes010/votes002>

Florida Bar Retention Poll: <https://www.floridabar.org/public/faircts/votes010/votes003>

Florida Supreme Court Justice

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: \$157,976

Justice Charles Canady, FL Supreme Court Justice - Merit Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Canady was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court by Gov. Charlie Crist in August 2008. Justice Charles Canady was born in Lakeland, Florida, in 1954. He is married to Jennifer Houghton Canady, and they have two children. He received his B.A. from Haverford College in 1976 and his J.D. from the Yale Law School in 1979. Justice Canady practiced law with the firm of Holland and Knight in Lakeland from 1979 through 1982. He practiced with the firm of Lane, Trohn, et al., from 1983 through 1992. From November 1984 to November 1990, Justice Canady served three terms in the Florida House of Representatives, and from January 1993 to January 2001, he served four terms in the United States House of Representatives. Throughout his service in Congress, Justice Canady was a member of the House Judiciary Committee. For three terms, from January 1995 to January 2001, Justice Canady was the Chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution. Upon leaving Congress, Justice Canady became General Counsel to Governor Jeb Bush. He was appointed by Governor Bush to the Second District Court of Appeal for a term beginning November 20, 2002. He served as Florida's 54th Chief Justice from July 2010 through June 2012. He was elected by his colleagues to serve as Chief Justice for a second time starting July 1, 2018, and a third time starting July 1, 2020.

<https://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Justices/Justice-Charles-T.-Canady>

Justice Jamie R. Grosshans, FL Supreme Court Justice - Merit Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Grosshans was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court by Gov. Ron DeSantis in September 2020. Previously she was appointed to the Fifth District Court of Appeal in 2018 by Governor Rick Scott. Prior to her appointment to the appellate court, she served as an Orange County Court Judge in the Ninth Judicial Circuit of Florida where she presided over criminal and civil matters. Justice Grosshans was raised in Brookhaven, Mississippi and graduated cum laude from the University of Mississippi School of Law. During law school, she clerked for the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Mississippi. Following admittance to the Florida Bar, she served as an Assistant State Attorney for the Ninth Circuit of Florida in both the misdemeanor and felony divisions where she tried numerous criminal jury trials. Justice Grosshans later entered private practice and founded her own law firm where she focused on family law and criminal defense matters for nearly ten years. During this time she also served as an Adjunct Professor at Valencia College where she taught Hospitality Law for the Hospitality and Tourism Management Program. She also frequently volunteered as a guardian ad litem with the Orange County Legal Aid Society. Justice Grosshans has served on state court system advisory committees and has been involved in numerous activities with the Florida Bar and other legal organizations. Justice Grosshans regularly speaks to lawyers and law students on topics such as challenges in the practice of law, the role of judges, professionalism and respect in the legal profession, criminal law, and family law.

<https://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Justices/Justice-Jamie-R.-Grosshans>

Justice Ricky Polston, FL Supreme Court Justice - Merit Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Polston was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court by Gov. Charlie Crist in October 2008. Florida Supreme Court Justice Ricky Polston is a native of Graceville, a small farming community in the panhandle of Florida. He graduated from Chipola College in 1975 with an associate's degree. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree, summa cum laude, from Florida State University, where he was named FSU's Most Outstanding Accounting Student and was inducted into the Beta Alpha Psi Honorary Accounting Society. Following graduation, he became a certified public accountant and practiced accounting with Deloitte Haskins & Sells in the Tampa office for seven years, concluding as an audit manager. He returned to FSU for his law degree. Although no longer practicing accounting, he remains a CPA and is a member of the Florida Institute of CPA's and the American Institute of CPA's. In 1986, Polston obtained a juris doctorate with high honors from Florida State University College of Law. He was a member of the Florida State University Law Review and the Order of the Coif. After becoming a member of the Florida Bar, he worked in private law practice in Tallahassee for 14 years, primarily in commercial litigation and was a certified circuit court mediator. He received a Martindale-Hubbell AV rating and was included in the Bar Register of Preeminent Attorneys. He was a member of the Tallahassee Bar Association and Tallahassee's American Inn of Court (former Treasurer). He was admitted to practice before the United States District Court, Northern District of Florida; United States District Court, Middle District of Florida; United States District Court, Southern District of Florida; United States Tax Court; United States Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit; United States Court of Federal Claims; United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and the United States Supreme Court. Polston became a judge at the Florida First District Court of Appeal in 2001 until becoming a Justice of the Florida Supreme Court in 2008. He has served a two-year term as Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court in 2012-14, as Administrative Justice for many terms, and has been on numerous Bar and Court committees and as the Court's liaison to them. Since 2003, he has been an adjunct professor at the Florida State University College of Law, teaching various courses including Florida Constitutional Law,

Insurance Law, and Florida Alternative Dispute Resolution. In 2013, Polston was honored to receive Florida State University's Circle of Gold recognition (Recipients are selected based on their dedication and loyalty to the university, and how they exemplify the Alumni Association's core values of tradition, leadership, family, spirit and greatness). Chipola College named Polston its 2021 Alumnus of the Year. That same year he also received the LeRoy Collins Distinguished Alumni Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Florida Colleges.

<https://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Justices/Justice-Ricky-Polston>

Justice John Couriel, FL Supreme Court Justice - Merit Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Couriel was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court by Gov. Ron DeSantis in June 2020. Justice John D. Couriel is the 90th Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. Justice Couriel was born in Miami, Florida in 1978. He is married to Rebecca L. Toonkel, M.D. They have two children. Justice Couriel received his A.B. magna cum laude from Harvard College in 2000 and his J.D. from Harvard Law School in 2003. He clerked for the Honorable John D. Bates of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia before joining Davis Polk & Wardwell in New York. His practice there included securities offerings, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcy matters, and investigations. In 2009, he became an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida. He prosecuted hundreds of federal offenses, including international money laundering, public integrity, healthcare fraud, and human trafficking crimes. In 2013, he joined Kobre & Kim LLP, where he specialized in cross-border disputes and investigations relating to financial products and services, asset recovery, and government enforcement defense, with an emphasis on clients in Latin America. Justice Couriel is a native speaker of Spanish. His parents emigrated from Cuba in the 1960s, his father as one of approximately 14,000 unaccompanied minors welcomed to the United States as part of Operation Pedro Pan.

<https://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Justices/Justice-John-D.-Couriel>

Justice Jorge Labarga, FL Supreme Court Justice - Merit Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Labarga was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court by Gov. Charlie Crist in January 2009. Jorge Labarga was born in Cuba in 1952. He is married to Zulma R. Labarga, and they have two daughters. He arrived in the United States at the age of 11 where he initially lived with his family in Pahokee, Florida. He graduated from Forest Hill High School in West Palm Beach in 1972 and received his B.A. (1976) and J.D. (1979) from the University of Florida. Justice Labarga began his legal career in 1979 as an Assistant Public Defender with the Public Defender's Office in West Palm Beach, assigned to the appellate, misdemeanor and felony trial divisions. In 1982 he joined the State Attorney's Office in West Palm Beach, where he tried cases ranging from theft to homicide. In 1987 he joined the firm of Cone, Wagner, Nugent, Roth, Romano & Ericksen, P.A., and specialized in personal injury trial work. In 1992 Justice Labarga participated in founding the law firm of Roth, Duncan & Labarga, P.A., in West Palm Beach, where he continued to specialize in personal injury litigation and criminal defense. Governor Lawton Chiles appointed Justice Labarga to the Circuit Court of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit, in and for Palm Beach County, in 1996. In that capacity he served in the family, civil and criminal divisions. He also served as the administrative judge of the civil division. In December 2008 Justice Labarga was appointed by Governor Charlie Crist to the Fourth District Court of Appeal. On January 6, 2009, he took office on the Florida Supreme Court after appointment by Governor Crist. He is the 84th Justice to take office at the Florida Supreme Court since statehood was granted in 1845. On July 1, 2014, he became the 56th Chief Justice of Florida -- the first Cuban American to lead the state judicial branch. He held that office for two terms until June 2018, the first chief justice to serve consecutive terms in a century.

<https://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Justices/Justice-Jorge-Labarga>

4th District Court of Appeals - 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 Years, Salary: \$157,976

Judge Ed Artau, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Artau was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2020.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Edward-L.-Artau>

Judge Cory J. Ciklin, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Ciklin was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Charlie Crist in August 2008.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Cory-J.-Ciklin>

Judge Dorian Damoorgian, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Damoorgian was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Charlie Crist in January 2008.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Dorian-K.-Damoorgian>

Judge Robert M. Gross, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Gross was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Lawton Chiles Jr. in 1995.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Robert-M.-Gross>

Judge Jonathan D. Gerber, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Gerber was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Charlie Crist in 2009.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Jonathan-D.-Gerber>

Judge Spencer D. Levine, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: Levine was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Charlie Crist in 2009.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Spencer-D.-Levine>

Judge Melanie G. May, FL 4th District Court of Appeal-Retention

Florida Bar Bio: May was appointed to the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeals by Gov. Jeb Bush in 2002.

<https://www.4dca.org/Judges/Judge-Melanie-G.-May>