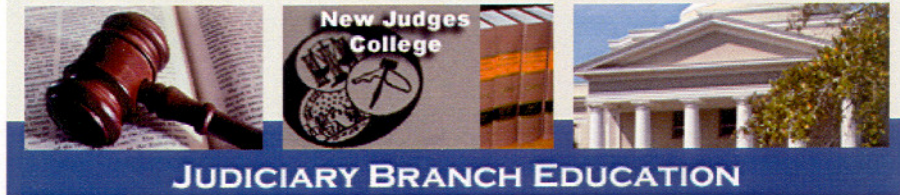


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Florida's Judicial Mentor Program

Since 1991, newly elected and appointed trial court judges have been paired with more experienced members of the judiciary as part of Florida's Judicial Mentor Program. Designed to make the transition from the bar to the bench as seamless as possible, the Mentor Program ensures new judges have ready access to critical information, court resources and one-to-one guidance immediately upon assuming the bench. Nationally recognized as a model educational program for new judges, the program is among the most effective means by which the courts systems assists those new to the bench in fulfilling a daunting number of new judicial responsibilities.

New judges are assigned a trained mentor judge within 48 hours of election or appointment. Mentors are expected to contact new judges and schedule an initial meeting within a week of the assignment. The first meeting routinely takes place before the new judge begins to hear cases, and is set early so that the new judge may be afforded an opportunity to observe other judges handling matters over which he or she will later be expected to preside. Though not an exclusive resource, mentors are a primary contact for new judges during their first full year in office.

The Judicial Mentor Program includes mentors, a mentor coordinator, and at least one trainer in each of the state's 20 judicial circuits. Mentors are appointed by the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court for two-year terms and must complete special training before they may be paired with new judges. Training sessions encompass matters with which new judges must be concerned in their first year on the bench, including questions relating to judicial ethics, continuing judicial education requirements, resources available within and outside the courts system, as well as local judicial policies and procedures. Mentors also participate in continuing mentor education programs at least every other year so they will be better able to consistently and competently exercise their responsibilities on behalf of the courts.

For additional information regarding Florida's Judicial Mentor Program, please contact the program director, Judge John Kest, at (407) 343-2491, or call the program staff, Cathy Brockmeier, at (850) 922-6467.