

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT, SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PASCO AND PINELLAS COUNTIES, FLORIDA**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2024-010 PA/PI-CIR

RE: PROFESSIONALISM COMMITTEE AND LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL

On or about January 9, 1998, then Chief Justice Gerald Kogan of the Florida Supreme Court requested that the chief judge of each judicial circuit appoint a Circuit Committee on Professionalism. The Committee was charged with the overall responsibility of initiating and coordinating professionalism activities within the circuit and to assist the Commission on Professionalism.

On or about January 14, 1998, the Sixth Judicial Circuit Professionalism Committee was established. The Bench and Bar of the Sixth Judicial Circuit have historically maintained a high level of professionalism. That high standard was reflected in the Sixth Circuit Standards of Professional Courtesy and the Professional Implementation Procedures (PIP) Committee, first adopted in Administrative Order 99-46. Since that time, the Circuit has had a PIP Committee designed to address complaints about professionalism problems on an informal basis. The commitment to high standards of professionalism in this Circuit was reaffirmed in Administrative Orders 2007-006, 2008-077, 2009-066, 2011-002, 2013-046, 2013-075, and 2015-052.

In 2015, the Florida Supreme Court adopted a Code for Resolving Professionalism Complaints. *In Re: Code for Resolving Professionalism Complaints*, 116 So.3d 280 (Fla. 2013). The Court required each chief judge to establish a Local Professionalism Panel to receive and resolve professionalism complaints informally. The Sixth Circuit had a PIP Committee to receive and resolve professionalism complaints informally, which was renamed the Local Professionalism Panel (LPP) in 2015. Accordingly, Administrative Order 2013-075 was amended to bring the Sixth Judicial Circuit's Standards of Professional Courtesy into compliance with the Code for Resolving Professionalism Complaints.

On July 6, 2023, the Florida Supreme Court replaced the 2013 Code for Resolving Professionalism Complaints with the Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals. *See In Re: Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals and Amendments to Rule Regulating the Florida Bar 6-10.3*, 367 So.3d 1184 (Fla. 2023). Accordingly, the Circuit's Administrative Order on Professionalism is once again amended to bring the Circuit into compliance with the Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals. The Circuit reaffirms its commitment to professionalism by reinvigorating its Professionalism Committee and Local Professionalism Panel.

In accordance with the Chief Judge's authority under article V, section 2, Florida Constitution, section 43.26, Florida Statutes, and Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.215, it is hereby

ORDERED:

A. PROFESSIONALISM COMMITTEE

1. Professionalism Committee. The Sixth Judicial Circuit Professionalism Committee ("Committee") will continue to operate in the Sixth Judicial Circuit ("Circuit"). The

Committee will initiate and coordinate professionalism activities throughout Pasco and Pinellas Counties.

2. Leadership of the Professionalism Committee. The Chief Judge of the Circuit will serve as the Chair of the Committee. The Chief Judge may appoint an Executive Chair. The Executive Chair will be responsible for appointing members to the Committee, coordinating meetings, and distributing information, among other professionalism-related duties. The Executive Chair is authorized to create and maintain subcommittees necessary to carry out the objectives of this administrative order and may appoint Chairs of such subcommittees. The Chief Judge has the authority to reconsider any decision made by the Executive Chair.

The Honorable Kimberly Byrd is appointed as Executive Chair of the Committee.

3. Appointments to Professionalism Committee. The following are appointed to the Committee:

- a. Six judges selected by the Chief Judge, representing different areas of substantive law;
- b. State Attorney for the Sixth Judicial Circuit, or their designee;
- c. Public Defender for the Sixth Judicial Circuit, or their designee;
- d. Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel, Second District, or their designee;
- e. President and President of the Young Lawyers Division of the Clearwater Bar Association, or their designee(s);
- f. President and President of the Young Lawyers Division of the St. Petersburg Bar Association, or their designee(s);
- g. President of the Tampa Bay Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), or their designee;
- h. President and President of the Young Lawyers Division of the West Pasco Bar Association, or their designee(s);
- i. President of the East Pasco Bar Association, or their designee;
- j. President of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers, Pasco and Pinellas Chapters, or their designee(s);
- k. President of the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, Pasco and Pinellas Chapters, or their designee(s);
- l. President of the Barney Masterson American Inn of Court, or their designee;
- m. President of the Fred G. Minnis, Sr. Bar Association, or their designee;
- n. President of the Judge Thomas E. Penick, Jr. American Inn of Court, or their designee;
- o. President of the Pinellas County Trial Lawyers Association, or their designee;
- p. President of the Pinellas Mid-County Bar Association, or their designee;
- q. Dean of Stetson University College of Law, or their designee;
- r. Members of the Local Professionalism Panel; and
- s. Such others named by the Chief Judge.

4. Meetings and Reports. The Committee will:

- a. meet periodically, but at least once per year, to discuss the status of professionalism and professionalism activities in the Circuit;
- b. complete biannual reports, as required by the Code; and
- c. on a periodic basis, facilitate and promote Continuing Legal Education courses on professionalism.

B. LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL

1. **LPP.** The LPP is the “Local Professionalism Panel” as defined by Section 3.1 of the Code.

2. **Purpose of the LPP.** The LPP serves as an informal and confidential peer-to-peer mentoring process for unprofessional conduct. This informal process is separate from, and in no way replaces, the formal disciplinary process under the Florida Rules of Professional Conduct.

3. **Leadership of the LPP.** The Chief Judge will appoint a Chair of the LPP. The Chair of the LPP is responsible for notifying the Executive Chair of the Professionalism Committee about the need to fill vacancies on the LPP, calling meetings of the LPP, recordkeeping as required by Section 3.7 of the Code, and timely submitting all reports to the Executive Chair of the Professionalism Committee. The Chief Judge has the authority to reconsider any decision made by the Chair of the LPP.

4. **Recordkeeping.** No records will be retained, except for such records necessary for compliance with reporting requirements outlined in Section 3.7 of the Code.

5. **Education.** The Chief Judge or their designee will educate lawyers practicing in the Sixth Judicial Circuit about the Circuit’s LPP through circuit-wide CLE programs on the role of LPPs. The Chief Judge may create a subcommittee to organize and promote the local CLE program or delegate this responsibility to the Committee.

C. LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL PROCEDURES

1. Terminology.

- a. **Initiator:** The complaining or referring party.
- b. **Contact Attorney:** The person who accepts referrals from various organizations, practitioners, or the Initiator.
- c. **Intermediary:** The member of the LPP who the Contact Attorney calls to handle the referral.
- d. **Concerned Party:** The attorney whose behavior is the subject of the referral.

2. **Local Professionalism Panel.**

- a. **Objective:** The goal of the LPP is to handle referrals about professionalism problems in an informal and confidential manner, functioning as a mediation process without the formality of actually bringing the parties into contact with each other. These procedures are meant to address unprofessional attorney conduct that has not risen to the level of necessitating a formal complaint with The Florida Bar.
- b. **Membership:** Unless otherwise adjusted by the Chief Judge, the LPP will consist of twelve members, six who will function as Intermediaries, and six who will serve as Contact Attorneys (eight total from Pinellas County and four total from Pasco County). Membership will be representative of the entire Circuit with a variety of practice areas represented. The membership of the LPP may change from time to time as deemed necessary by the Chair or Executive Chair of the Professionalism Committee. Recommendations for appointment to the LPP may be received by the Executive Chair of the Professionalism Committee from local bar associations, other professional organizations, judges, and practitioners. Members of the LPP must be lawyers and judges in good standing with The Florida Bar and must have practiced law for at least five years. Additionally, members must undergo training conducted by experienced lawyers involved in The Florida Bar disciplinary process prior to serving on the LPP. Members of the LPP will also serve as members of the Professionalism Committee. The list of current LPP panel members is attached as Attachment A and may be altered without the need to amend this Administrative Order.
- c. **Terms:** Members of the LPP serve staggered three-year terms, beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30 of the third year. LPP members may be reappointed to serve one additional three-year term. Under no circumstances may a member serve for more than six consecutive years.
- d. **Immunity:** LPP members have immunity from civil liability for acts committed in the course and scope of their duties under the Code.

3. **Procedures.** Professionalism referrals may be initiated directly through the LPP or through the Attorney Consumer Assistance and Intake Program (ACAP) of The Florida Bar, as prescribed by Sections 1.2 and 2.1 of the Code. The LPP does not have the authority to discipline a Concerned Party or require that the Concerned Party appear before the LPP. However, it may counsel or recommend an appropriate program to the Concerned Party if it deems necessary.

- a. **Initiating a Professionalism Referral Before the LPP:** Any person may initiate an unprofessional conduct referral against a member of The Florida Bar practicing within the Sixth Judicial Circuit through the LPP or through ACAP. The Initiator may be referred to a Contact Attorney by an outside source, such as a bar association or practitioner, or the Initiator may contact one of the Contact Attorneys directly. The Initiator may also initiate a referral through The Florida Bar by submitting a Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form found at

<https://www.floridabar.org/prof/local/lpp-referral-form/>. The LPP may also review referrals submitted by the ACAP.

- b. **Receipt of Referral:** The Contact Attorney, without making any judgments concerning the referral, will contact an Intermediary and describe the referral. When contacting an Intermediary, the Contact Attorney will take into account the geographic location and area of practice of the Concerned Party.
 - c. The Intermediary has the discretion to:
 - i. Contact the Concerned Party and discuss the referral and secure a resolution, which may include informally recommending an appropriate program or ethics course to the Concerned Party, or any other such solution the Intermediary or LPP deems appropriate or necessary.
 - ii. Consult with any other Intermediary on how to handle the referral.
 - iii. Decide there is no unprofessional conduct or insufficient information upon which to act.
 - iv. Refer the referral to ACAP.
 - v. Refer the matter to The Florida Bar.
 - d. **Resolution:** LPP members should strive to resolve all referrals in a timely manner. Once the matter has been informally resolved, the Intermediary will contact the Initiator to explain the resolution.
 - e. **Confidentiality:** All referrals, the names of the Concerned Party, and communications to and within the LPP and with the Concerned Party will remain confidential.
 - i. Except as provided herein, confidentiality will be required throughout the process and there will be no discussions of the matter beyond the Initiator, Contact Attorney, Intermediary, the Concerned Party, or any other person engaged in the LPP process.
 - ii. If a referral is referred to The Florida Bar, Section 3.6 of the Code applies.
- 4. LPP Meetings and Reports.**
- a. **Meetings and Conferences:** The LPP will meet from time to time to discuss the types of situations that have arisen and their resolutions, and to discuss possible modifications in procedure or structure of the process. Additionally, the Chair of the LPP, or the member of the LPP designated by the Chair, must attend conferences and trainings organized by The Florida Bar.
 - b. **Biannual Reporting:** The LPP, through the Executive Chair, is required to biannually file a written report with the Chief Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit. Upon review and approval, the report will be submitted as required by the Code. The reports must be submitted twice a year, in June and December, on the form required by the Code. All reports must comply with the confidentiality

requirements outlined in the Code. These reports will then be posted on the Sixth Judicial Circuit's website, as required by the Code.

Administrative Order 2015-052 PA/PI-CIR is hereby rescinded. The Court may update the attachment to this Administrative Order without an amendment to this Administrative Order.

DONE AND ORDERED in Chambers at Clearwater, Pinellas County, Florida, this _____ day of February 2024.

ORIGINAL SIGNED ON FEBRUARY 28, 2024
BY SHAWN CRANE, CHIEF JUDGE

ATTACHMENT A: Local Professionalism Panel Membership Roster

cc: All Judges
The Honorable Bruce Bartlett, State Attorney
The Honorable Sara Mollo, Public Defender
The Honorable Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Pinellas County
The Honorable Nikki Alvarez-Sowles, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Pasco County
The Honorable Bob Gualtieri, Sheriff, Pinellas County
The Honorable Chris Nocco, Sheriff, Pasco County
Jennifer Parker, Trial Courts Administrator
Michele Emmerman, Deputy Trial Courts Administrator
Ita M. Neymotin, Regional Counsel, Second District
Ngozi Acholonu, Assistant Regional Counsel
Kimberly Thompson, Chief Operations Officer, Pasco County Clerk's Office
Dean Benjamin Barros, Stetson University College of Law
Aram Papken Megerian, President, Tampa Bay Chapter ABOTA
Bar Associations, Pasco and Pinellas Counties
Law Libraries, Pasco and Pinellas Counties

Attachment A

Sixth Judicial Circuit Local Professionalism Panel Membership Roster

Chair of the LPP: Andrew Sasso

Pasco County

<u>Name</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
<i>Contact Attorney East Side</i> Ryan Doddridge	Office: 727-846-8500	Probate/Civil	June 30, 2027
<i>Contact Attorney West Side</i> Francis Werner-Watkins	Office: 727-863-1553	Criminal	June 30, 2027
Amanda Colon	Office: 813-254-8998	Family	June 30, 2026*
L. Javan Grant	Office: 813-995-6444	Personal Injury	June 30, 2025*

Pinellas County

<u>Name</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
<i>Contact Attorney</i> Andrew Sasso	Office: 727-441-8966	Probate	June 30, 2027
<i>Contact Attorney</i> Bridget Heptner	Office: 727-726-9799	Family	June 30, 2027
<i>Contact Attorney</i> Denis DeVlaming	Office: 727-461-0525	Criminal	June 30, 2026*
<i>Contact Attorney</i> Joshua Chilson	Office: 727-461-1818	Personal Injury	June 30, 2026*
Raleigh "Lee" Greene	Office: 727-821-2900	Family	June 30, 2026*
Shirin Vesely	Office: 727-896-7171	Civil	June 30, 2025*
Zack Zuroweste	Office: 727-796-7666	Probate/Civil	June 30, 2025*
Weston "Wes" Smith	Office: 727-408-6100	Personal Injury	June 30, 2025*

To stagger the terms of LPP members, members designated with an * will initially serve a shorter term. Thereafter, members of the LPP serve staggered three-year terms, beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30 of the third year. LPP members may be reappointed to serve one additional three-year term. Under no circumstances may a member serve for more than six consecutive years.

Updated contact information can be found on The Florida Bar's Lawyer Directory.

Last Updated 2/27/24