

Ann Melinda Uraggs

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September 30, 2025

Marion County Board of County Commissioners 601 Southeast 25th Avenue Ocala, Florida 34471 Via E-mail: countycommissioners@marioncountyfl.org

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RE: Marion County Dependency General Magistrate

Dear Commissioners:

This letter follows the July 17, 2025, budget workshop before the Board of County Commissioners, where Administrative Judge Steven Rogers, General Magistrate Joshua Soileau, Trial Court Administrator Jeffery Fuller and myself appeared representing the Court system. At the workshop Commissioner Zalak reasonably requested a return-on-investment analysis relating to the work Mr. Soileau performs as a magistrate dedicated to Marion County's dependency docket. This letter serves to provide that analysis. The metric for dependency cases is adherence to the Statutorily mandated timeframes by quantifying the number of hearings the dedicated dependency General Magistrate conducts. The County's funding of this position allows the Courts to resolve a child's involvement in the dependency system more quickly, leading to permanency for children.

In 2021, when the initial request was made to fund a General Magistrate position dedicated to dependency cases, we projected a full-time General Magistrate would be able to preside over approximately 1,500 hearings per year. As the attached chart reflects, the Magistrate has exceeded that projection in serving the families of Marion County. The funding of the Magistrate position has enabled the Marion County Dependency docket to remain under the State median in timeliness metrics and ensures cases are heard in compliance with statutory timelines, despite the population growth over the same time period.

Additionally, as part of his caseload, Dependency Magistrate Soileau also presides over the Early Childhood Court (ECC) and Family Treatment Court (FTC) programs in Marion County. Those two programs are both funded solely by grants and by the State but require a dependency Judge or Magistrate to preside over the programs. The County's continued funding of the Magistrate position allows these

¹ All data is provided by the Office of the State Courts Administrator.

ECC and FTC resources and services to be made available to the citizens of Marion County and which are proven to reduce recidivism in dependency cases.

The Board's investment in and ongoing financial commitment to this position provides an indispensable and beneficial service to the County and ensures that children removed from their parents are handled with the urgency, care, and thoroughness those children deserve, and the law requires.

Should the Board as a whole or any Commissioner wish any additional information or supporting data, please let me know and I will be happy to provide the same. Thank you, again, for recognizing the vital role this position plays in our child welfare system and for the continued investment in the families of Marion County.

Ann Melinda Craggs

5th Judicial Circuit Administrative Judge

Circuit Judge

cc:

Judge Steven Rogers
General Magistrate Joshua Soileau
Trial Court Administrator Jeffery Fuller

Case Numbers:

	2022	2023	2024	2025**
New Cases Created:	443	345	305	283

^{**}Numbers for 2025 are only reflected through September 26, 2025

Hearing Numbers:

	2022	2023	2024	2025**
Judicial Reviews/Status	1552	1571	1575	934
Problem-Solving Courts	148	240	350	178
Totals	1700	1811	1925	1112

^{**}Numbers for 2025 are only reflected through September 25, 2025

Child Impact:

# of Children	2022	2023	2024	2025**	
Removed:	467	344	236	136	
In Cases Closed:	576	363	403	231	

Reunified:	250	172	165	93
Adopted:	114	66	83	83
Guardianship:	79	83	127	46

^{**} Numbers for 2025 are only reflected through September 25, 2025

Time (Median # of Days):

	2022				
# of Days from Removal to:	<u>Marion</u>	5 th Circuit	<u>State</u>		
Reunification	255	282	335		
Closure in Reunification	500	527	547		
Closure in Guardianship	525 534		544		
	2023				
# of Days from Removal to:	<u>Marion</u>	5 th Circuit	<u>State</u>		
Reunification	287	not provided	371		
Closure in Reunification	454	not provided	584		
Closure in Guardianship	626	not provided	631		
	2024				
# of Days from Removal to:	<u>Marion</u>	5 th Circuit	<u>State</u>		
Reunification	328	not provided	363		
Closure in Reunification	572	not provided	600		
Closure in Guardianship	718	not provided	650		

	2025			
# of Days from Removal to:	<u>Marion</u>	5 th Circuit	State	
Reunification	347	not provided	361	
Closure in Reunification	531	not provided	572	
Closure in Guardianship	625	not provided	635	

Early Childhood Court (ECC):

	2022	2023	2024	2025
# of children served:	34	49	39	34
# of families served:	16	27	23	20

Family Treatment Court (FTC) (previously Dependency Drug Court):

	2022	2023	2024	2025
# of new participants:	16	29	18	12
# of affected children:	11	28	18	43