



*Ann Melinda Craggs*

*Maria J. Berrios*  
JUDICIAL ASSISTANT  
PHONE 352/401-6785  
FACSIMILE 352/401-6760

CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE  
FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
OF FLORIDA

MARION COUNTY JUDICIAL CENTER  
110 NW FIRST AVENUE  
SUITE 3030  
OCALA, FLORIDA 34475

September 30, 2025

Marion County Board of County Commissioners  
601 Southeast 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Ocala, Florida 34471  
Via E-mail: [countycommissioners@marioncountyfl.org](mailto:countycommissioners@marioncountyfl.org)

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<sup>1</sup> 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

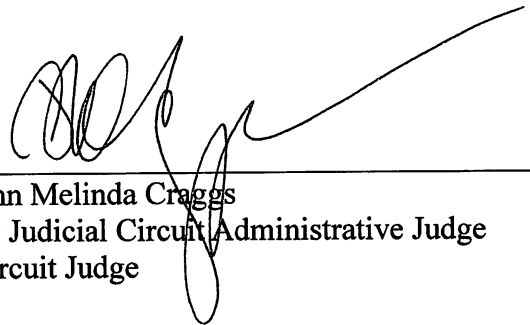
---

<sup>1</sup> 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  
5<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Administrative Judge  
Circuit Judge

cc:

Judge Steven Rogers

General Magistrate Joshua Soileau

Trial Court Administrator Jeffery Fuller

**Case Numbers:**

|                    | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025**</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| New Cases Created: | 443         | 345         | 305         | 283           |

\*\*Numbers for 2025 are only reflected through September 26, 2025

**Hearing Numbers:**

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

\*\*Numbers for 2025 are only reflected through September 25, 2025

**Child Impact:**

|                  | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025**</b> |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| # of Children    |             |             |             |               |
| 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):**

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

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

**Early Childhood Court (ECC):**

|                       | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| # of children served: | 34          | 49          | 39          | 34          |
| # of families served: | 16          | 27          | 23          | 20          |

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

|                         | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> | <b>2024</b> | <b>2025</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| # of new participants:  | 16          | 29          | 18          | 12          |
| # of affected children: | 11          | 28          | 18          | 43          |