

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Appropriations

BILL: SPB 2512

INTRODUCER: For Consideration by the Appropriations Committee

SUBJECT: Judges

DATE: February 16, 2026

REVISED: _____

ANALYST

Kolich

STAFF DIRECTOR

Sadberry

REFERENCE

ACTION

Pre-meeting

I. Summary:

SPB 2512 amends s. 26.031, F.S., to establish thirteen new circuit court judgeships and s. 34.022, F.S., to establish twelve new county court judgeships.

The Supreme Court issued Order No. SC2025-1808, dated November 26, 2025, certifying the need for thirteen new circuit court judgeships and twelve new county court judges.

The bill conforms to SPB 2500, the Senate's Fiscal Year 2026-2027 General Appropriations Act, which includes \$11,915,074 in General Revenue funding, and authorizes fifty-nine full-time equivalent positions with associated salary rate of 6,941,206, for the newly established judgeships and associated judicial assistants and attorney staffing. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill is effective July 1, 2026.

II. Present Situation:

Article V, s. 9 of the State Constitution states:

Determination of number of judges.—The supreme court shall establish by rule uniform criteria for the determination of the need for additional judges except supreme court justices, the necessity for decreasing the number of judges and for increasing, decreasing or redefining appellate districts and judicial circuits. If the supreme court finds that a need exists for increasing or decreasing the number of judges or increasing, decreasing or redefining appellate districts and judicial circuits, it shall, prior to the next regular session of the legislature, certify to the legislature its findings and recommendations concerning such need. Upon receipt of such certificate, the legislature, at the next regular session, shall consider the findings and recommendations and may reject the recommendations or

by law implement the recommendations in whole or in part; provided the legislature may create more judicial offices than are recommended by the supreme court or may decrease the number of judicial offices by a greater number than recommended by the court only upon a finding of two-thirds of the membership of both houses of the legislature, that such a need exists.

To determine a need for trial court judgeships, the Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) relies on an analysis of weighted caseload filings per judge. In 1999, the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) collaborated with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to develop and validate a weighted caseload system.¹ The weighted caseload system assigns a time value to cases by their case type, based on the various kinds and complexity of the cases that are filed. The case type time value, or case weight, establishes an approximate workload value per case filing by case type, which is used to determine the number of judges required to handle these cases. The system is periodically revised by NCSC and OSCA to account for changes in procedure and case complexity. It was most recently revised in June 2024.²

On November 26, 2025, the Supreme Court issued Order No. SC2025-1808, certifying the need for thirteen additional circuit court judges and twelve additional county court judges. Although the overall judicial need indicated by the methodology was greater, the certification reflects a deliberate, incremental approach to fully addressing judicial need overtime.³

Article V, s. 9 of the State Constitution requires that upon receipt of such certification, the Legislature, at the next regular session, shall consider the findings and recommendations and reject the recommendations or by law implement the recommendations in whole or in part. If the Legislature creates more judicial offices than are recommended by the Court or decreases the number of judicial offices by a greater number than recommended by the Court, then there needs to be a finding of two-thirds of the membership of both houses of the Legislature, that such a need exists.⁴

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 26.031, F.S., to establish 13 additional circuit judgeships in the following circuits:

- First Judicial Circuit: 26 to 27.
- Fifth Judicial Circuit: 34 to 35.
- Seventh Judicial Circuit: 29 to 30.
- Eighteenth Judicial Circuit: 26 to 27.
- Nineteenth Judicial Circuit: 20 to 21.
- Twentieth Judicial Circuit: 32 to 40.

¹ National Center for State Courts, *Florida Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report*, Office of the State Courts Administrator (May 16, 2016), <https://flcourts-media.flcourts.gov/content/download/216629/file/Final-Florida-Judicial-Workload-Assessment-Final-report.pdf>

² National Center for State Courts, *Florida Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report*, Office of the State Courts Administrator (June 2024), https://www.flcourts.gov/content/download/2438568/file/Judicial_Workload_Report_Final.pdf

³ *In Re: Certification of Need for Additional Judges*, SC2025-1808 (Fla. SC 2025)

⁴ Article V, S. 9, Fla Const.

The bill amends s. 34.022, F.S., to establish 12 additional county judgeships in the following counties:

- Duval County: 17 to 20.
- Highlands County: 1 to 2.
- Hillsborough County: 25 to 26.
- Lee County: 9 to 10.
- Miami-Dade County: 47 to 50.
- Orange County: 22 to 24.
- Walton County: 1 to 2.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill conforms current law to the Senate's proposed Fiscal Year 2026-2027 General Appropriations Act, which includes \$11,915,074 in General Revenue funding, and

authorizes 59 full-time equivalent positions with associated salary rate of 6,941,206, for the newly established judgeships and associated judicial assistant and attorney staffing.

Under s. 29.008, F.S., counties are responsible for facilities, security, communications and information technology costs for county courts. The bill could result in additional costs in these areas, to the extent that county courts will be receiving additional judges and associated staff; however, any additional costs associated with the newly established positions can likely be absorbed within existing resources.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 26.031 and 34.022.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.