

District 2 Appeals Court Judges Up for Retention
League of Women Voters of Manatee County
November 2022

Florida requires Florida Supreme Court justices and appeals court judges to be placed on the ballot in non-partisan elections every six years so voters can decide whether they should stay on their courts for another 6-year term. They are not running against opponents or each other. A “yes” vote means you want the judge to remain on the court. A “no” means you want the judge to be removed from the court.



Robert J. Morris Jr. is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office on August 1, 2009. His current term ends on January 2, 2023

He was appointed to the court by then-Republican Governor Charlie Crist.^[1] He was retained by voters on November 2, 2010, and again on November 8, 2016.

He attended the University of Florida for his bachelor’s degree and DePaul University College of Law for his law degree.

Morris practiced law for 17 years before becoming a judge. He was a prosecutor, a partner and state-wide management committee member in a national law firm and the principal of his own firm.

His first judicial appointment was to the Pinellas County Court. He served as a Sixth Judicial Circuit Court judge before his appointment to the Second District Court of Appeal in 2009. He was appointed to the court by then-Republican Governor Charlie Crist. He was retained by voters on November 2, 2010, and again on November 8, 2016.



Craig Villanti is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office in 2003. His current term ends on January 2, 2023.

He was appointed by Republican Governor **Jeb Bush** in 2003 and was retained by voters on November 2, 2004, on November 2, 2010, and again on November 8, 2016

Villanti earned his B.A. in political science from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 1974 and his law degree from Stetson University College of Law in 1977

After law school, Villanti entered private practice in New Port Richey, Florida. He was an active member of the West Pasco Bar Association and became its president in 1985. In 1990, he became a traffic court magistrate for the Sixth Judicial Circuit. Two years later, he was elected circuit judge of that court. He mostly served in Pasco County and continued in this position until his appointment to the court of appeal in 2003.



Suzanne Labrit is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. She assumed office on July 29, 2020. Her current term ends on January 2, 2023.

Labrit was appointed to the court by Governor **Ron DeSantis** (R) to fill the vacancy created by the elevation of John Badalamenti

She received her B.A. in English literature at University of Florida in 1981 and a J.D. at Nova Southeastern University Law Center in 1986.



Nelly Khouzam is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. She assumed office on August 1, 2008. Her current term ends on January 2, 2023.

She was appointed by then-Republican Governor Charlie Crist and joined the court on August 1, 2008.^{[1](#)}

Khouzam was retained by voters on November 2, 2010, and again on November 8, 2016

Khouzam earned her B.A. in history from the University of Florida in 1979 and received her J.D. from the University of Florida College of Law in 1981

After law school, Khouzam clerked for Second District Court of Appeal Judge Jack R. Schoonover. After her clerkship, Khouzam entered private practice and was later a shareholder at the law firm Fowler, White, Gillen, Boggs, Villareal and Banker, P.A. She was a shareholder with Silberman and Khouzam, P.A. when she was appointed to the Sixth Judicial Circuit of Florida. She held this position for 14 years before her appointment to the Second District Court of Appeals.



Patricia Kelly is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. She assumed office in 2001. Her current term ends on January 2, 2023.

She was appointed by Republican Governor Jeb Bush in 2001 and was retained by voters on November 2, 2004, November 2, 2010, and November 8, 2016..

She received her bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida in 1983 and her law degree from University of Florida College of Law

Kelly began her legal career in private practice with law firms in Tampa and West Palm Beach. She left private practice to serve as staff attorney for Florida Second District Court of Appeal Judge James E. Lehan. She returned to private practice and handled appellate matters until her appointment to the court of appeals



John K. Stargel is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office on July 29, 2020. His current term ends on January 2, 2023.

He was appointed to the court by Governor Ron DeSantis (R) to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Samuel Salario.

Stargel received his bachelor's degree from the University of Tampa in 1987 and his law degree from the Florida State University School of Law in 1991

Before joining the appellate court, Stargel was a judge of the Tenth Judicial Circuit Court in Florida. He was first elected on September 5, 2006 (effective in early 2007) and he has served in the Felony Division. He was re-elected in 2012 and his term was set to expire in January of 2019.¹



Matthew C. Lucas is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office on December 23, 2014. His current term ends on January 2, 2023.

He was appointed to the court by then-Republican Governor Rick Scott to fill a vacancy created by the Florida State Legislature.^[1]

Lucas was retained by voters on November 8, 2016, for a six-year term.

Lucas received his bachelor's degree from Florida State University and his J.D. from the University of Florida

Lucas was previously a judge on the Florida 13th Circuit Court. He was appointed to that court by Governor Rick Scott on December 21, 2012, to succeed retired Judge Susan Sexton.^[2] He served on that court until his appointment to the Second District Court of Appeal in 2014.

- 2015 - Present: Judge, Florida Second District Court of Appeal^[1]
- 2012-2014: Judge, Thirteenth Circuit Court
- 2010-2012: Judge, Hillsborough County Court
- 2002-2010: Associate/shareholder, Bricklemyer, Smolker & Bolves, P.A.
- 1999-2002: Associate, Carlton Fields, P.A.



Stevan Northcutt is a judge of the Florida 2nd District Court of Appeal. He assumed office on January 6, 1997. His current term ends on January 2, 2023. He was appointed by Democratic Governor Lawton Chiles and joined the court in 1997. He served as chief judge of the court from July 2007 through June 2009.^[1]

Northcutt was most recently retained on November 8, 2016.

Northcutt earned his B.A. in mass communications from the University of South Florida in 1975 and received his J.D. from Florida State University College of Law in 1978. He worked as a journalist before becoming a lawyer

Northcutt practiced law with the firm Levine, Freedman, Hirsch & Levinson, P.A. from 1978 to 1986. From 1986 to 1997, he was a shareholder in this firm. Throughout his career, Northcutt has focused on appellate advocacy.