

Preliminary Overview of Free Responses to the Survey for Members of the Public

September 28, 2023

Introduction

This document supplements the statewide results of the public survey presented at the September 15, 2023, meeting of the Judicial Circuit Assessment Committee. The document contains compilation data concerning the multiple- and scaled-choice questions from the statewide results only and adds information on free responses associated with particular questions. Due to limitations in the survey tool, the colors green and red for the compilation data do not always correspond to “yes” and “no” answers.

This document quotes free responses that are illustrative of the particular category of comments, with numbers in parentheses indicating the number of respondents who provided the same or a similar response. It is not designed to quote or republish all of the free responses, which are drawn from individual surveys and thus typically are specific to the particular judicial circuit selected by the respondent. Because many comments were multifaceted, a single response may have been classified under several categories. This preliminary report does not provide a summary for every free response but rather focuses on free responses related to the effects of consolidation. Staff of the Office of the State Courts Administrator will continue to analyze the remaining free responses and update this report accordingly (e.g., adding responses related to the effects of administrative changes; cost savings; uniformity; less disruptive adjustments; and other information that respondents indicated should be considered in evaluating the issue of whether to consolidate judicial circuits). Where helpful to readability of a quoted response, in a few instances staff made non-substantive, technical revisions (e.g., adding closing punctuation or correcting a typographical error).

Response reports for the multiple- and scaled-choice questions for each individual circuit can be obtained at www.flcourts.org/JCAC.

A total of 2,087 respondents completed the survey.

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Question 1 – Judicial Circuit

In which county (judicial circuit) do you have experience interacting with the court system?

County	Count	Percent
Alachua County (8th Judicial Circuit)	8	0.38%
Bay County (14th Judicial Circuit)	200	9.58%
Bradford County (8th Judicial Circuit)	2	0.10%
Brevard County (18th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Broward County (17th Judicial Circuit)	13	0.62%
Calhoun County (14th Judicial Circuit)	4	0.19%
Charlotte County (20th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Clay County (4th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Collier County (20th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Columbia County (3rd Judicial Circuit)	3	0.14%
Duval County (4th Judicial Circuit)	13	0.62%
Escambia County (1st Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Flagler County (7th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Franklin County (2nd Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Gadsden County (2nd Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Gilchrist County (8th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Gulf County (14th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Hillsborough County (13th Judicial Circuit)	44	2.11%
Holmes County (14th Judicial Circuit)	9	0.43%
Jackson County (14th Judicial Circuit)	47	2.25%
Lake County (5th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Lee County (20th Judicial Circuit)	10	0.48%

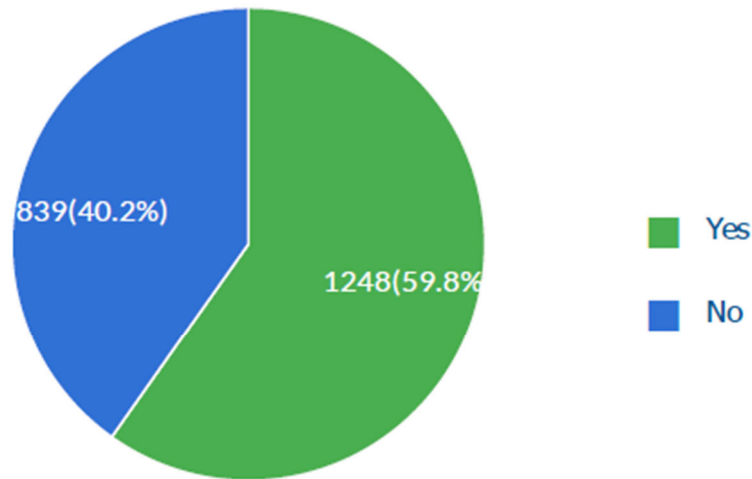
Leon County (2nd Judicial Circuit)	12	0.57%
Madison County (3rd Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Manatee County (12th Judicial Circuit)	8	0.38%
Marion County (5th Judicial Circuit)	3	0.14%
Martin County (19th Judicial Circuit)	3	0.14%
Miami-Dade County (11th Judicial Circuit)	28	1.34%
Monroe County (16th Judicial Circuit)	1,490	71.39%
Okaloosa County (1st Judicial Circuit)	4	0.19%
Orange County (9th Judicial Circuit)	33	1.58%
Osceola County (9th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Palm Beach County (15th Judicial Circuit)	79	3.79%
Pasco County (6th Judicial Circuit)	2	0.10%
Pinellas County (6th Judicial Circuit)	5	0.24%
Polk County (10th Judicial Circuit)	8	0.38%
St. Johns County (7th Judicial Circuit)	4	0.19%
St. Lucie County (19th Judicial Circuit)	14	0.67%
Santa Rosa County (1st Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Sarasota County (12th Judicial Circuit)	6	0.29%
Seminole County (18th Judicial Circuit)	4	0.19%
Sumter County (5th Judicial Circuit)	1	0.05%
Volusia County (7th Judicial Circuit)	5	0.24%
Walton County (1st Judicial Circuit)	6	0.29%
Washington County (14th Judicial Circuit)	5	0.24%

Responses were received from all 20 judicial circuits. However, no responses were submitted from the following counties: Baker, Citrus, De Soto, Dixie, Glades, Hamilton, Hardee, Hendry,

Hernando, Highlands, Indian River, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Liberty, Nassau, Okeechobee, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, and Wakulla.

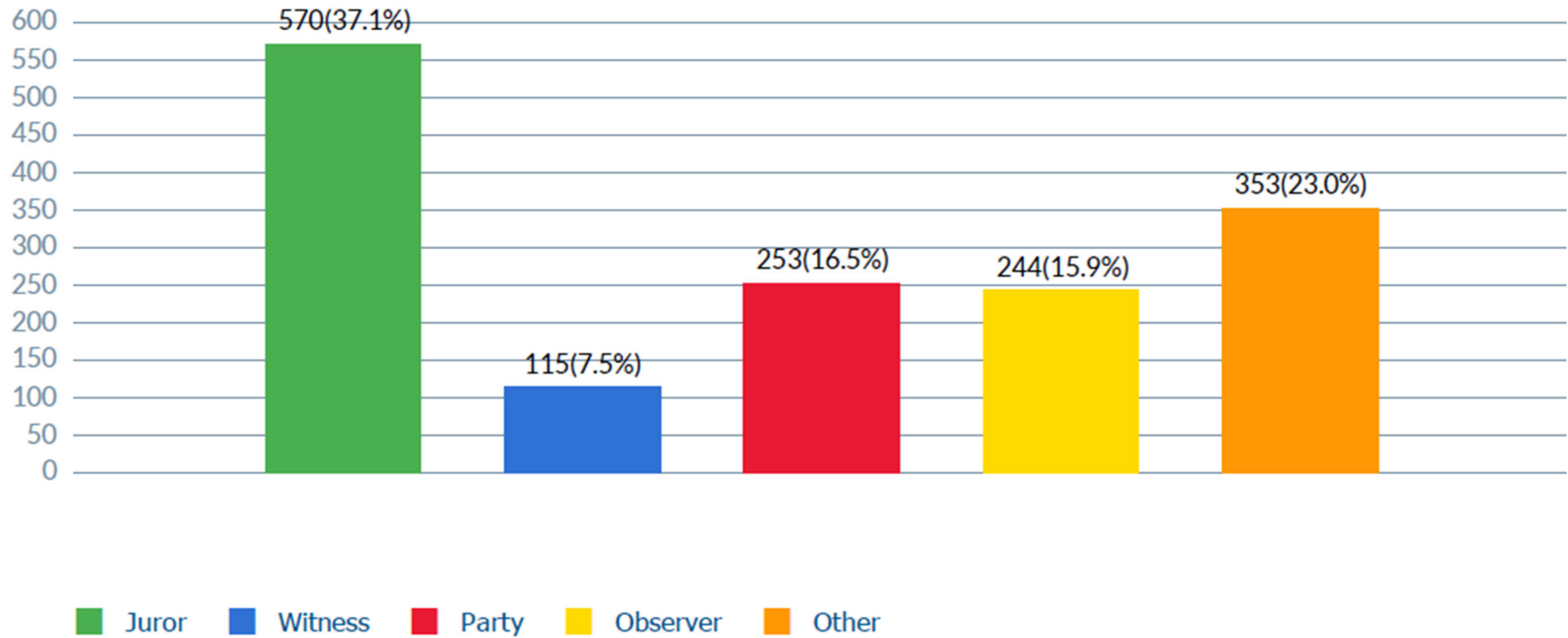
Question 2 – Experience with the Judicial Circuit

Have you had any experience with the judicial circuit within the last five years?



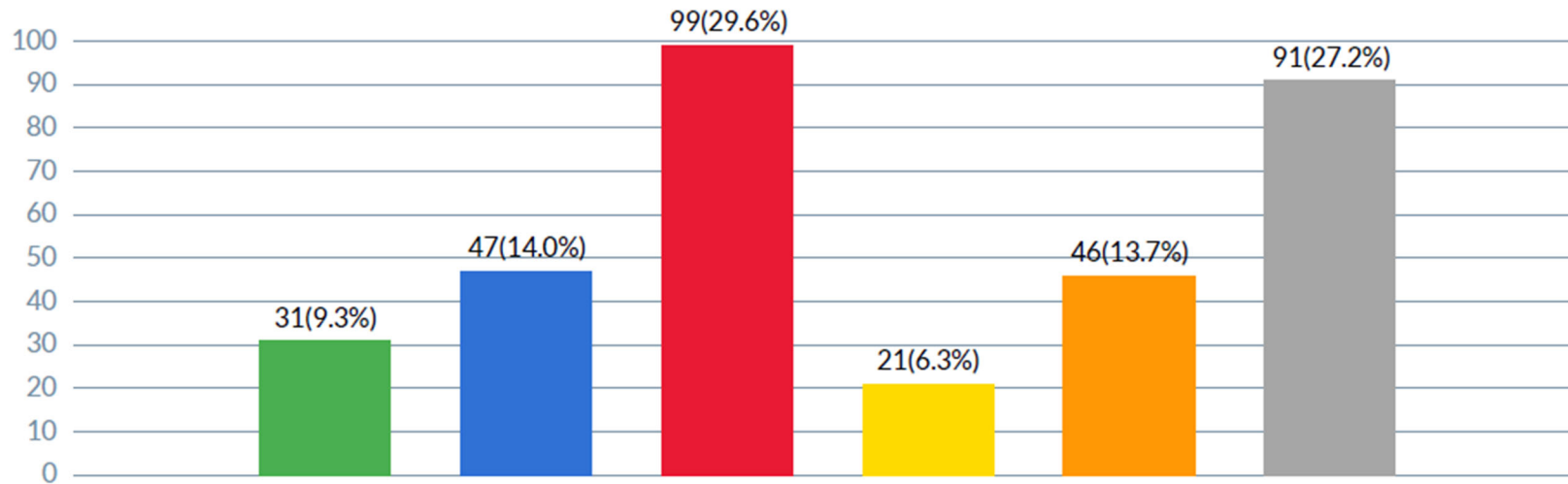
Question 2a – Involvement with Judicial Circuit

If yes, what was your involvement (select all that apply)?



Question 2b – Party Case Type

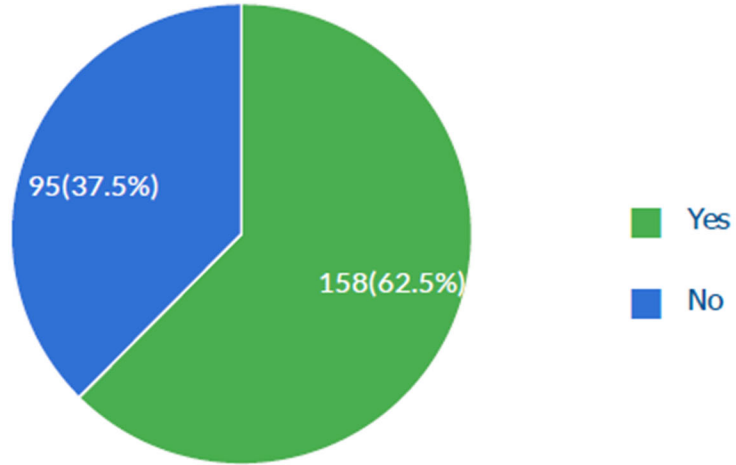
If a party, what type of case(s) were involved in (select all that apply)?



- Circuit Criminal (felony charges)
- Circuit Civil (large monetary disputes)
- Family (divorce, juvenile delinquency and dependency, and other family law matters)
- Probate (disposition of a deceased person's estate)
- County Criminal (misdemeanor charges)
- County Civil (smaller monetary disputes, eviction, and traffic offenses)

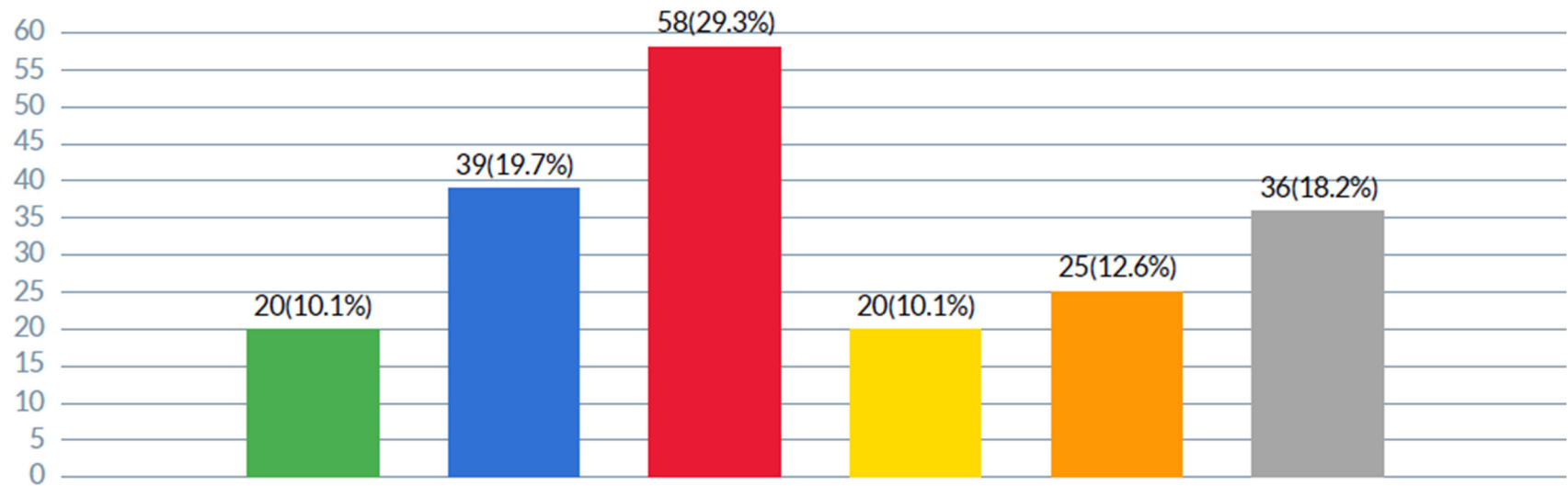
Question 2c – Attorney Representation

Were you represented by an attorney?



Question 2d – Representation Case Type

If yes, what type of case(s) were you represented in (select all that apply)?



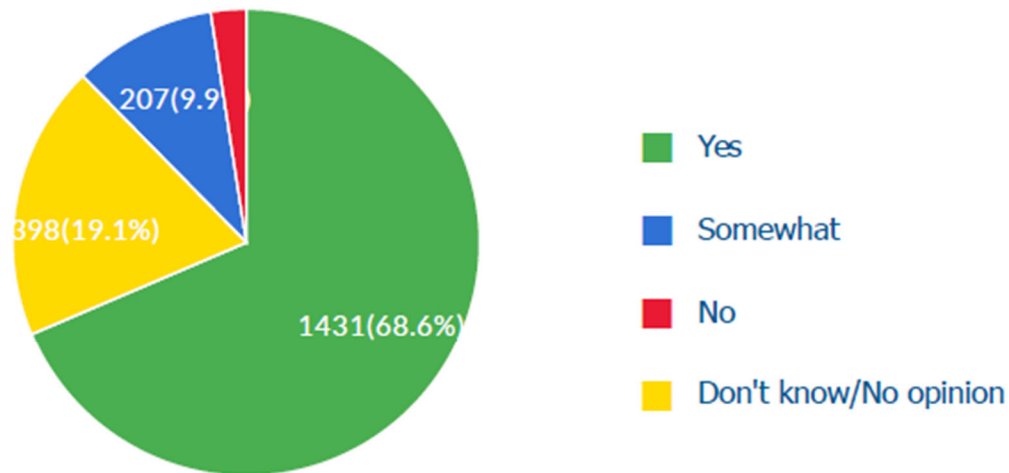
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Criterion 1 – Effectiveness

The evaluation for this criterion is based on multiple-choice questions using the following scale: Yes, Somewhat, No, or Don't Know/No Opinion.

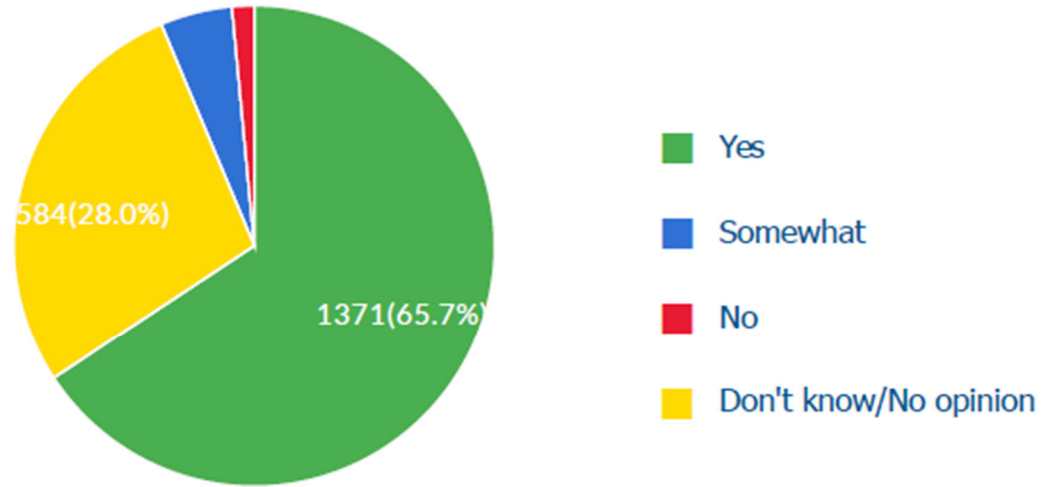
Question 3 – Expedites Appropriate Cases

Does the judicial circuit expedite appropriate cases?



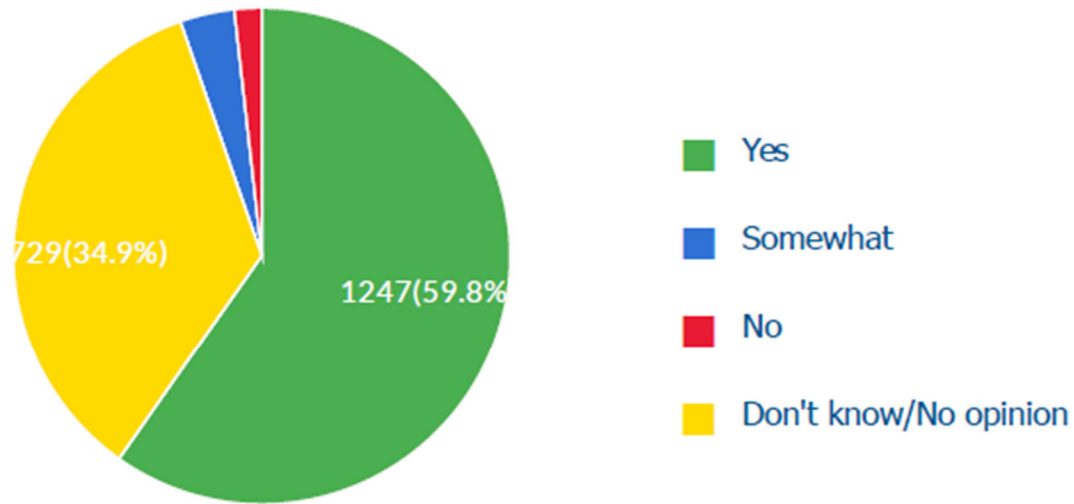
Question 4 – Issues Written Decisions when Warranted

Do the judges in your judicial circuit issue written decisions in appropriate circumstances?



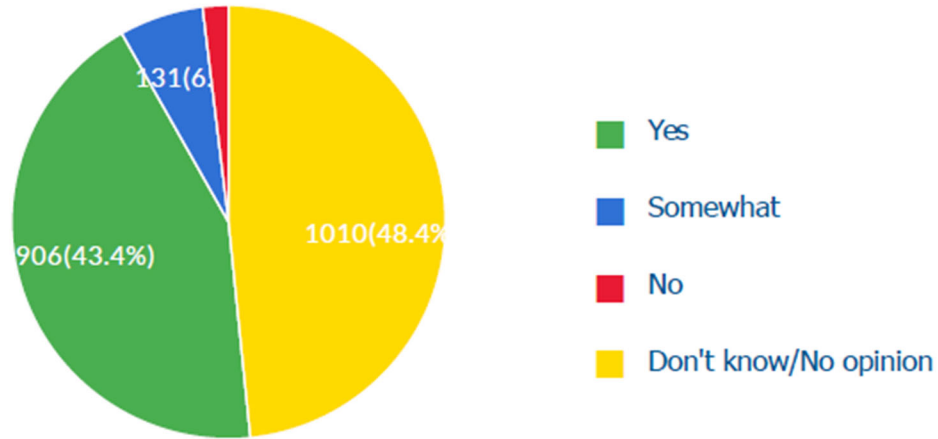
Question 5 – Capable of Accommodating Changes in Law

Do the judges in your judicial circuit consider changes in statutes or caselaw when ruling on cases?



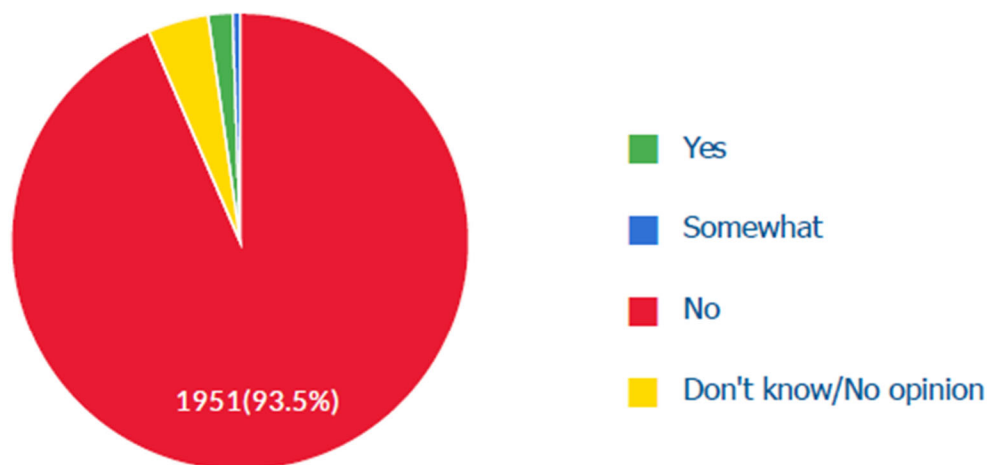
Question 6 – Permits Judges to Serve on Committees

Does the circuit manage its workload in a way that permits judges to engage in non-case-related activities (e.g., service on court committees)?



Question 7 – Would Effectiveness Be Improved through Consolidation

Would the effectiveness of the judicial circuit be improved through consolidation with another judicial circuit?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

Analysis of “yes” free responses

36 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 1.7%) answered the question in the affirmative. The comments in favor of consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced public trust and confidence (20 responses), illustrative comments include the following:

- “The state attorney office was basically nonresponsive to our needs and it seemed like we (the complainant) were a[n] afterthought to the state attorney. We apologize for having a crime committed against us.”
- “Waited 3 years to be heard for a minor political case. It was the state attorney who dragged it on for a large contributor to his campaign. Had this been heard in a different venue it would have been dismissed immediately with no [merit] but the Bubba system continues to prevail.”
- “The 14th judicial circuit is the most inefficient, corrupt, and unethical circuit in the state of Florida, if not the country. This circuit needs to be cleaned out for lack of better words. It truly is an embarrassment to the state of Florida.”
- Enhanced professionalism (13 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Monroe County is a small community and prosecutors pick and choose who they want to go after based on who someone is or who their family is. The things that go on down here would never fly in a big city where these things have no bearing.”
 - “There is no balance of fair justice for people of color and low income within the 14th Circuit. You should never fear your local elected officials and sadly many do. The citizens deserve a more professional, transparent and honest judicial circuit and by dissolving the 14th would begin the process. Consolidation into other circuits is a win for citizens throughout the 14th and the opportunity to rid the current ‘good ole boys’ out.”
- Improved efficiency (4 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - "More efficient handling of caseload. Not enough SA [state attorney] or PD [public defender] staff. Cases take too long. 90% of detainees in county jail awaiting trial.”
 - “There is so much time wasted on these cases that if consolidated would shorten the amount of time spent on cases, which would leave the time saved ready to take on new cases, rather than have cases waiting 1-5 years. Even though in Bay

County it's just a MONEY GAME having cases set & set for years before most are closed or thrown out due to lack of evidence! We need to do better & be better!”

- Resource sharing and economies of scale (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Economies of scale and scope.”
- Diversity and quality of applicants for judicial vacancies (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Unfortunately because of the geographical location of Monroe County the judicial system here is heavily based on local political and financial support by a small, but influential group of individuals. By enjoining with a larger district, this would hopefully bring a broader group of individuals into the system here, reducing the amount of political influence some individuals/corporations have over the current system.”
- Cost savings (2 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “As a taxpayer three courthouses are an exorbitant amount of additional burden to pay for.”

Additionally, a few comments were not responsive to the specific question (3 responses).

Analysis of “somewhat” free responses

11 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 0.5%) answered “somewhat.” Comments to this effect fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced public trust and confidence (7 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Our community in the Keys is very small so potential jurors are often familiar and personally know the attorneys, judges, plaintiffs and defendants. Consolidating could potentially create a more fair environment.”
 - “It may allow outside voices to overcome the “good ole boy” judgment/favors.”
- Improved efficiency, resource sharing and economies of scale (4 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “More efficiencies with staff and be able to leverage court staff.”
 - “I believe that sharing caseloads between circuits could improve efficiency.”

Analysis of “no” free responses

1,951 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 93.5%) answered the question in the negative. The comments opposed to consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Concerns about geography and logistics (615 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation would require counsel to travel further for hearings within the circuit requiring more coverage of the workload. When the attorney needs coverage the cases don’t move. Also, court administration is circuit wide and would require additional interpreters and other court personnel where staffing issues already exist.”
 - “The logistics of this has to be impossible. We will have judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and private attorneys working regions that could only possibly make sense to a group of people who govern. This would likely result into making up sections of large circuits that will probably end up looking like the circuits the way

they are currently already. Is it lost on our government that we not only deserve, but have the right to representation and to select those who represent us? This will also likely result in an unending war of both parties to try to constantly change the judicial system in Florida. This is divisive and unnecessary.”

- “The consolidation would create hardships for many people who would be forced to travel long distances at times to be able to effectively participate in the judicial processes and proceedings.”
- “Distance and access to local legal resources would be a huge concern.”
- Uniqueness of the circuit’s geography, demographics, or culture (504 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The 14th judicial circuit is geographically and demographically distinct. Our region in the 14th circuit is best served by people from our area, who understand our unique set of issues, benefits and people. Consolidation would rob our area of representation in our judicial system, by the people and for the people of our distinct part of the state.”
 - “Monroe County is unique and has different challenges than Miami-Dade. We must have our own court system.”
 - “Our local area and regulation enforcement is too unique and important to be combined.”
- Concerns about local systems/processes and loss of local accountability (305 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I had a very personal experience as a victim of a crime, I was kept up to date by the prosecutor and the victims advocate, I personally spoke with the State Attorney and was well informed about how the process would work. Consolidation would take away all of the personal input I got throughout this process.”

- “Coming from a small county to be grouped in with the largest county would be detrimental to locals needing or using the legal court systems. We have different issues here that would be [a]ffected differently if taken on by mainland judges.”
- “We are a small county and if absorbed into a larger area our ability to handle local issues locally will be lost.”
- Loss of local representation (299 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Dilutes the voters’ ability to elect officials that represent their values for a[n] honest and effective judicial system.”
 - “Solutions are local; representation of the voices of Monroe would be lost through consolidation.”
 - “I wouldn’t want someone that is not FROM my community/circuit making decision FOR my community/circuit.”
- Loss of community connection (282 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The judicial system is best served a close to the people as possible.”
 - “It is important to me that the officials that handle 19th circuit cases reflect the officials that have been locally elected and have geographic and socioeconomic ties to my community.”
 - “You would lose local people who know the community and pay attention to what is going on in this area.”
- Lack of necessity, insufficient evidence, the circuit is currently working well, or consolidation will make no difference (275 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “I don't think this would be an improvement.”
 - “The judicial circuit for the 6th circuit functions great as is.”

- “I cannot imagine any situation where this would improve effectiveness.”
- “There do not appear to be any problems with our 16th Judicial Court system the way it is now, so why fix what isn't broken?”
- Decreased effectiveness (189 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidating would make the circuit far less effective.”
 - “If anything the effectiveness would be worse. We need the judicial system to be local.”
 - “Consolidation into another judicial circuit would cause an unnecessary burden on the people within the 14th judicial circuit while reducing the effectiveness of the judicial process within the circuit.”
 - “A state attorney two hours away cannot be as responsive to crime victims and our community needs like my local state attorney is.”
 - “Caseload in Miami-Dade would only hinder the circuit from doing an adequate job. This exists in all areas of life. In order for proper, effective, and efficient work to be done, the caseload should not overwhelm.”
- Decreased efficiency (165 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “In my experience, consolidation always leads to longer wait times, poor customer service, and sometimes lack of concern because it is no longer local community in charge.”
 - “I'm concerned with overcrowding the court system. Too much workload leads to things not getting done like they are supposed to and not getting done as fast as they could be. Also, attitudes towards work, the way things should be handled for the area, etc. are looked at different in different areas.”
 - “Consolidating the 11th judicial circuit with another circuit will not enhance effectiveness due to the unique dynamics and caseload of each circuit. Maintaining

the current setup allows for better focus on local nuances and efficient case management.”

- The circuit is already too large (138 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “System is already overloaded. Consolidation would decrease accessibility and cause more logjams.”
 - “I believe consolidating the circuits would increase the workload in an already over congested system.”
 - “Our circuit already includes 6 counties and it is a lot managing those 6 with one advocacy organization, with the workload and the driving time to get from one county to another for proceedings. I couldn’t imagine how much it would slow down the process if the circuit was made any bigger.”

- Concerns about increased workload (116 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It’s common sense. You’re going to have one big circuit. How can one circuit move through so many cases? We already know prosecutors are not going to stop filing so many cases.”
 - “Would harm the economy by loss of jobs in this low income area. And cause a larger case load/workload on the employees that remain. All court staff, clerks, judges, state attorney, and public defender employees.”
 - “Consolidation would create an incredibly larger workload than what exist today.”

- Increased costs (82 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Public transportation to Miami Dade is limited. Traffic problems and costs of overnight lodging are issues.”
 - “Consolidating to Miami Dade would only complicate, overload, cause delays, cause more money for taxpayers. Keep Monroe County as is!”
 - “Monroe county is small and unique in its needs. Miami Dade is too far away, does [not] have an accurate idea of our residents needs or circumstances. Many residents work multiple jobs to continue to work and live here. Having to travel for court related responsibilities is asking way too much of us. Time, travel costs, lost wages pose a high burden on an already overburdened population.”

- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy (81 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The only reason to consolidate judicial circuits is to consolidate power. This should not be allowed.”
 - “The Monroe County Courts work fine. No need to mess it up with big city politics.”
 - “You will have one prosecutor making the filing decisions for every defendant in the state. This is a former of gerrymandering.”

- Access to courts would be reduced (79 responses) illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation would reduce public access and make the courts less accessible and accountable to the public.”
 - “Population is growing in Florida. Access to court docket should be timely and geographically accessible not combined and lessened by reduction in the number of circuits.”

- Reduced public trust and confidence (40 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Past experience tells me that when you combine rural counties with multiple urban counties the rural counties, and rural people, get lost in the shuffle. Also, if bigger was better and more effective then we should just fold up all the circuits into one big circuit. Spreading the district across a larger geographic area just makes it less available to those of us in rural areas. In addition, as it become more remote the trust level is impacted because now it is ‘them’ making decisions instead of ‘we’ are making decisions.”
 - “It would cause lack of trust due to not having local courts and prosecutors in our local area.”
 - “Rurally populated counties would receive less attention and be overshadowed by the larger counties in which they would be absorbed. I don't think the elected officials would be as in tuned with the rural life of a county that is over 100 miles away from them having been elected and presiding over people who don't know them or probably even trust them. It would feel like an invisible hand to most I could assume.”

- Insufficient resources and staffing concerns (37 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “They are already overloaded with cases and improperly staffed. This would do nothing but compound the issue.”
 - “This goes past courtrooms, which is very important. Medical Examiner is one example. Can you imagine needing to wait longer to get a final result? Having a local judge and jury who are part of the fabric of a community is vital to impartial and personally experienced [landscapes] of each area. Being a less populated region of Florida does not give the state the right to move our resources for the sake of saving money. Where will all of the accessory staff find jobs? Will they move as

well? Will they now work in a ‘satellite office’ where their work is not fulfilling their duties to the job they once held? Not a good idea. Many reasons.”

- Increase the number of circuits, judges, or resources (35 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It is already a lot of case with both Orange and Osceola counties and with ALL the people moving to Florida and Orange and Osceola counties --- if ANYTHING we should be expanding!!!”
 - “[Circuit] 19 functions well now... if anything we could use another judge to lighten the load and provide more court time.”
 - “Consolidation would reduce representation and make it harder for citizens to interact with the judicial system. Consolidation would be a violation of our civil rights. If anything we need more circuits based on growth.”
 - “We need quality control and more state attorneys overseeing the judicial system, not less.”

- Demographic and geographic diversity of applicants for judicial vacancies (6 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It will decrease diversity and harm the decision-making process.”
 - “Diversity is critical to ensure every ethnicity and socioeconomic is represented.”
 - “Monroe county is a completely separate entity from Dade County. The nature of crimes are different. Miami Dade is already overwhelmed. Miami Dade population is so large, it would be difficult to elect judges from Monroe County.”

- Current case management practices/efficiencies would be jeopardized (4 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I believe a consolidation would have a negative impact on the Circuit and the way cases are processed and sentenced.”
 - “The law enforcement and judicial entities in the 6 counties in this circuit have working relationships that have been developed and nurtured for nearly a century. There is a way of life that ties these counties together not just in a judicial sense, but in a lifestyle. Judicially, we are intertwined and connected and close. One example: Collaborative processes we designed work for us in dealing with the millions of tourists who travel to Bay through our other counties via State 79, State 77 and U.S. 231 and include working with ALA [Alabama] officials. We have an identify and way of life that is reflected in our judicial processes and that would be lost if consolidated. We have IT [information technology] work-arounds to assist our smaller counties who don't have the resources of Bay. We have a system designed and refined over decades that keeps us communities safe, keeps people connected and makes sure they are heard.”
- Decreased professionalism (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Our judicial circuit is highly professional and serves our county's resident, tourists and businesses extremely well. They reflect our community and they focus on our community. I don't see any way that such a consolidation serves our community at all, and will only create not address gaps in effectiveness, efficiency, professionalism and public trust. Please recommend against consolidation of the 16th circuit with the 11th. Thank you.”
 - “It is my opinion that in addition to the geographical challenges of a consolidation, the citizens of Monroe County would not receive the same level of concern,

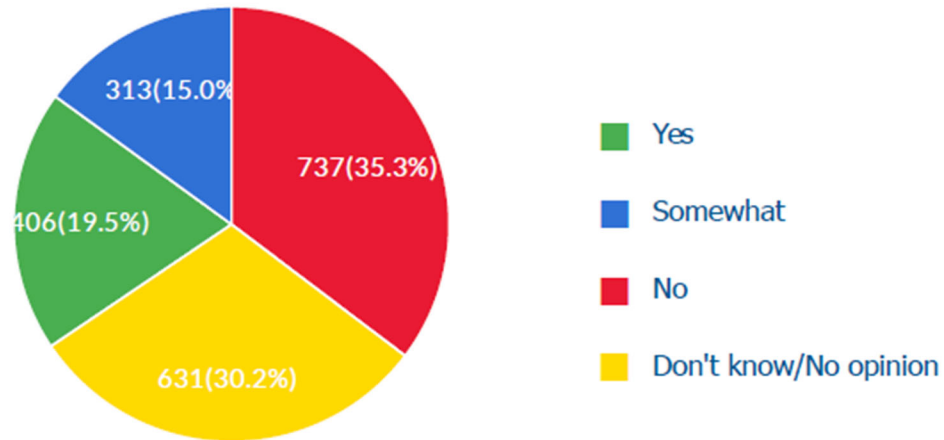
professionalism, and successful judicial services they do now under the current system.”

- Data systems and technical challenges (2 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “If anything, we should be considering adding districts. Furthermore, not to mention cost millions of dollars to integrate IT systems resulting in higher costs to taxpayers that would take decades to resolve.”
- Concerns about the quality of applicants for judicial vacancies (1 response):
 - “Monroe County is unique and much different than Miami/Dade County. Monroe County is much less political. The Judges in Monroe County are very qualified and efficient in processing their cases and producing legal opinions. A consolidation would reduce the quality of our legal system in Monroe County and only weaken our rule of law. Why fix something that is working very well and serving the People of Monroe County effectively only to save money that will most probably be misspent somewhere else. Please do not consolidate and dilute the Monroe County Circuit Court system into something less than we now have which is working just fine.”

Additionally, many respondents provided an answer that was not responsive to the specific question (41 responses).

Question 8 – Would Effectiveness Be Improved by Administrative Changes

Would the effectiveness of the judicial circuit be improved by administrative changes (e.g., deploy new technology, increase ratios of support staff per judge, create branch locations, create subject matter divisions, add geographic divisions, etc.)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

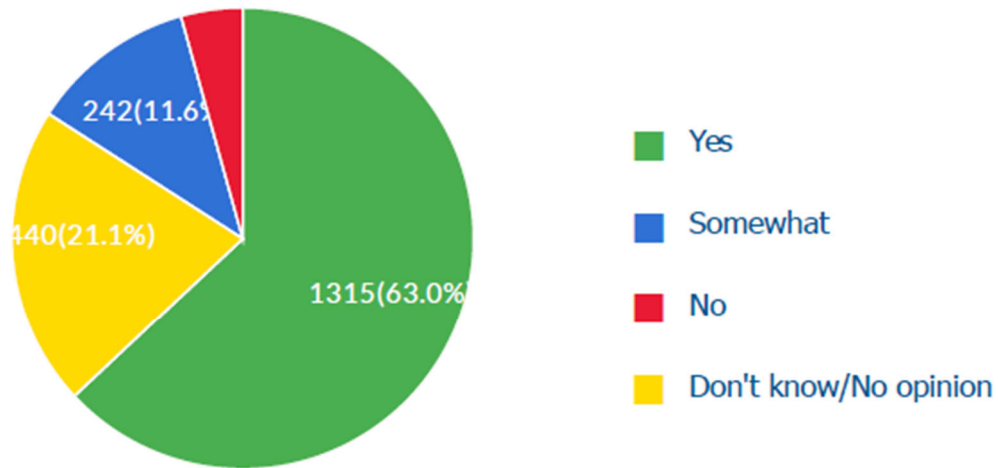
An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Criterion 2 – Efficiency

The evaluation for this criterion is based on multiple-choice questions using the following scale: Yes, Somewhat, No, or Don't Know/No Opinion.

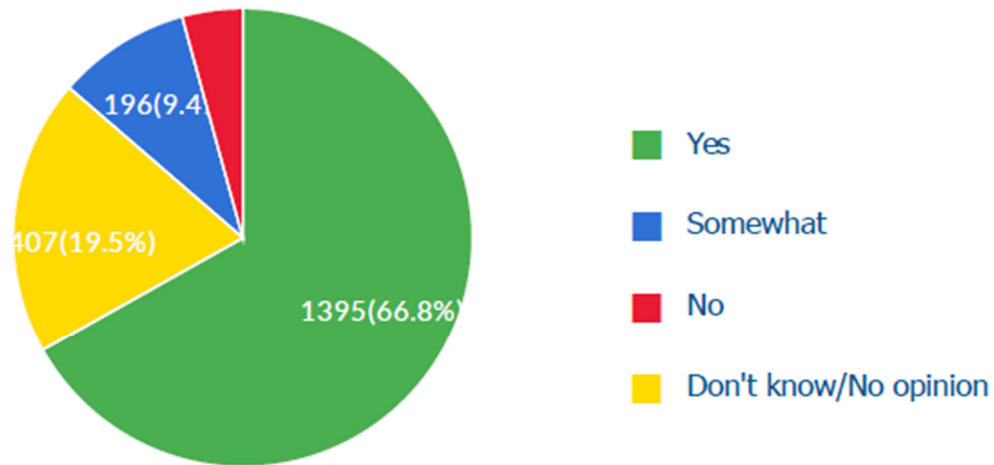
Question 9 – Stays Current with its Caseload

Does the judicial circuit stay current with its caseload?



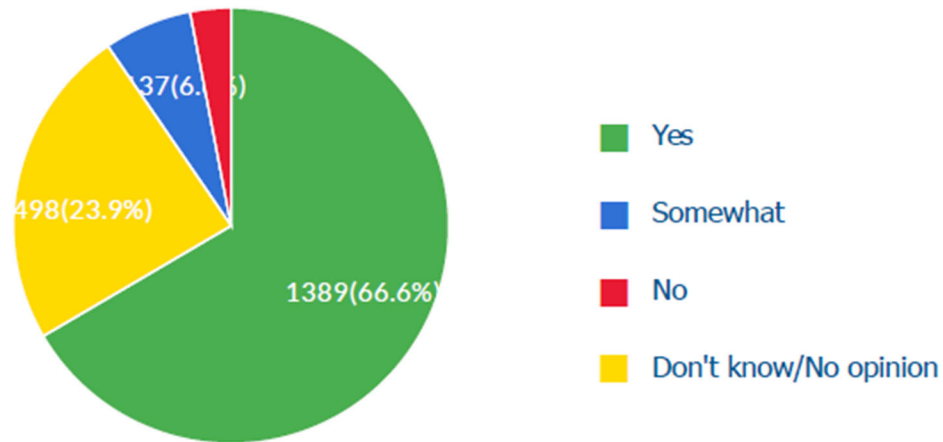
Question 10 – Adjudicates within Time Standards

Does the judicial circuit have adequate procedures to ensure efficient, timely disposition of its cases?



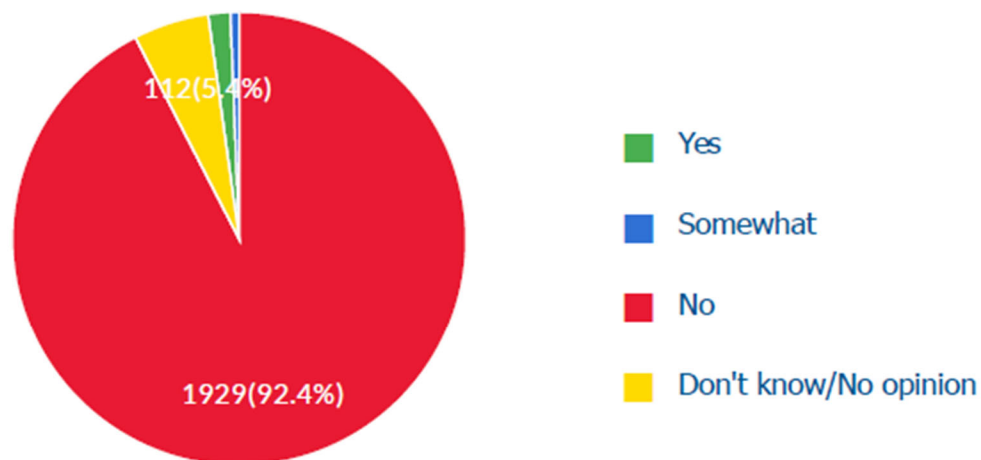
Question 11 – Uses Resources, Case Management Techniques, and Technology to Improve Performance

Does the judicial circuit use its resources, case management techniques, and technologies to improve the efficient adjudication of cases, research of legal issues, and issuance of decisions?



Question 12 – Would Efficiency Be Improved through Consolidation

Would the efficiency of the judicial circuit be improved through consolidation with another judicial circuit?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

Analysis of “yes” free responses

33 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 1.6%) answered the question in the affirmative. The comments in favor of consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Improved efficiency, resource sharing, and economies of scale (9 responses), illustrative comments include the following:

- “The efficiency and the availability to research legal issues, issuance of decisions and the ability to have a bigger pool of judges and assistances, researchers would serve the communities better.”
- “Spreading caseload could help as long as it isn't buried.”
- “It’s always better to have more resources to share, more colleagues to consult with, and fresh eyes on issues.”
- Enhanced professionalism (5 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Again, it would assist in weeding out the bad apples who have tarnished the 14th and hold them to the higher standard other circuits implements.”

Additionally, many respondents solely referenced previous answers without further explanation (4 responses) or were not responsive to the specific question (7 responses).

Analysis of “somewhat” free responses

13 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 0.6%) answered “somewhat.” Comments to this effect fall into the following broad categories:

- Resource sharing and economies of scale (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Depends on if there are gaps not being met or not enough workload to keep full time staff busy.”
- Enhanced public trust and confidence (2 responses), illustrative comments include the following:

- “It is possible that it could create more fair trials and reduce expenses; however, I think there should be a clear business plan that demonstrates significant savings and improved outcomes.”
- Improved efficiency (1 response):
 - “Again, any changes to spread the caseloads would be an improvement.”
- Concerns about geography and caseload (1 response):
 - “If they are the same size.”

Additionally, some respondents provided an answer that was not responsive to the specific question (2 responses).

Analysis of “no” free responses

1,929 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 92.4%) answered the question in the negative. The comments opposed to consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Concerns about geography, logistics, and access to the courts (298 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Too geographically distant.”
 - “Travel concerns for the public can be especially difficult over the length of the Keys from Key West to Miami.”
 - “It will slow the system down further and require victims/witnesses in cases to travel further to appear in cases creating an undue burden.”
- Decreased efficiency (251 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “This would likely create overwhelm rather than efficiency.”

- “Things would take longer if our county was merged with a larger one.”
- “The existing efficiency of Miami-Dade judicial circuits is poor as it is. Adding to it would only delay cases, cause appeals and more courtroom disruption.”
- Lack of necessity, insufficient evidence, the circuit is currently working well, or consolidation will make no difference (231 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “We are effective and move our case load quickly. We do not have a back log of cases.”
 - “If it’s no broken, don’t fix it.”
 - “What we have works just fine. Don't mess with it.”
- Uniqueness of the circuit’s geography, demographics, or culture (151 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We are a 120-mile-long rural county.”
 - “Monroe county is unique and has completely different priorities with government and community needs. Tourists, fishing, lobstering, environmental and the wellbeing of the small communities.”
 - “The criminal issues in Monroe Country might not bear the same importance as those of Miami Dade.”
- Concerns about increased workload (150 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Miami Dade cannot handle their current workload.”
 - “By consolidating circuits, you are creating larger caseloads and forcing both circuits to change the way they do things. This is inefficient and stupid.”
 - “It would back log cases”

- The circuit is already too large (119 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Bigger isn't better. Our circuit already includes two large counties.”
 - “It would be made worse. Miami-Dade is already overburdened.”
 - “Consolidation would mean further burdening a judicial system already overwhelmed.”

- Loss of local representation (102 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We would lose representation.”
 - “It would be watered down and no true representation.”
 - “We must have our own representation in our own county. It sure would not be efficient to ask jurors to drive multiple hours for jury duty. One day in Miami Dade for jury duty would be 6 hours of driving in one day.”

- Loss of community connection (71 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The judicial circuit should be in county of the residents it serves.”
 - “I think we would get lost in the system and our cases would not get the attention they deserve.”
 - “Local guidelines for local communities, not tossed in with uninterested nonresidents that do not support our districts values. Those values should not be altered by being grouped with non-related groups in fluxing into our community.”

- Decreased effectiveness (50 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It would diffuse the services and their quality.”
 - “No, consolidation usually result in less people, backlogs and poor customer services.”

- “Our court system in Monroe County would be hindered in its effectiveness if a consolidation with Miami-Dade was in place.”
- Insufficient resources and staffing concerns (46 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “As stated previously, the ‘do more with less’ mentality has never work throughout history and never will when dealing with humans and criminal nature.”
 - “People are already overworked and underpaid. Caseloads are only going up with workforce being reduced.”
 - “It will create a massive inconvenience for employees of the courts and the residents.”
- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy (46 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “This is a political power grab. Local accountability and representation is important.”
 - “Combing the courts does not serve the people and is judicial gerrymandering.”
 - “A larger circuit would have more chaos and bureaucracy.”
- Increased costs (22 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Too costly for taxpayers and defendants.”
 - “It will be a loss of time and money to do so.”
 - “That will drive up costs/taxes and dilute the attention to detail of our current system.”

- Reduced public trust and confidence (17 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “As a public member of circuit 14, our rural region deserves representation within reach. Consolidation would make all of us represented by big cities far away from us. There would be less public trust and efficiency of resources.”
 - “Asked and answered; we don’t trust Miami-Dade court systems.”
 - “Same as previous. Miami-Dade is corrupt and too big.”

- Current case management practices/efficiencies would be jeopardized (14 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Combining the current caseload with the caseload of another circuit would only increase the work of the judges and judicial staff and complicate case management. It doesn't make any sense.”
 - “The circuit as it is already has its policies and procedures outlined and have training to make sure everyone is on the same page.”
 - “I believe a consolidation would have a negative impact on the Circuit and how cases are handled.”

- Concerns about local systems/processes and loss of local accountability (14 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “This would limit [the] ability to make local decisions that matter to our local community and would overtax our judges and citizens.”
 - “The closer that officials in the justice system are to their constituents the more accountable they are.”

- Increase the number of circuits, judges, or resources (4 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I think we need more judicial resources/personnel rather than consolidating and combining.”
 - “If anything we need to expand the circuit. For the 9th Judicial, separate Orange and Osceola - into two different circuits!”

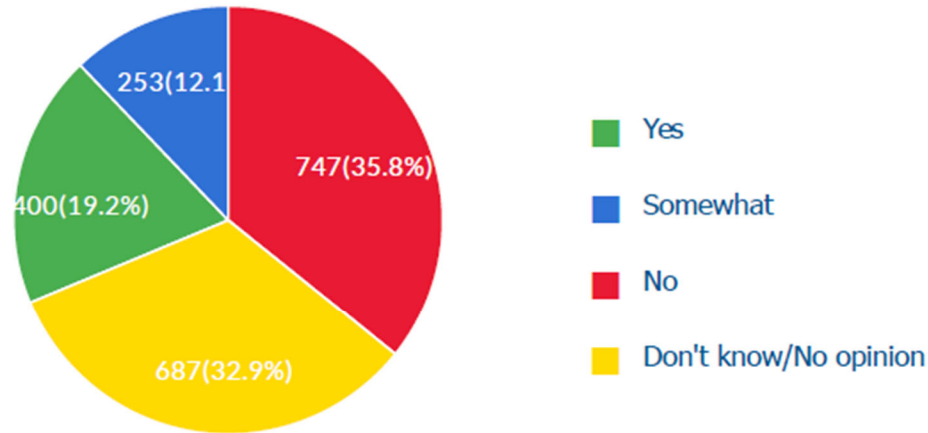
- Data systems and technical challenges (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I don't think consolidation would help with any of those things. In fact, it may decrease efficiency by imposing more bureaucratic structure and technological difficulties.”

Additionally, many respondents solely referenced previous answers without further explanation (131 responses) or were not responsive to the specific question (71 responses).

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Question 13 – Would Efficiency Be Improved by Administrative Changes

Would the efficiency of the judicial circuit be improved by administrative changes (e.g., deploy new technology, increase ratios of support staff per judge, create branch locations, create subject matter divisions, add geographic divisions, etc.)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

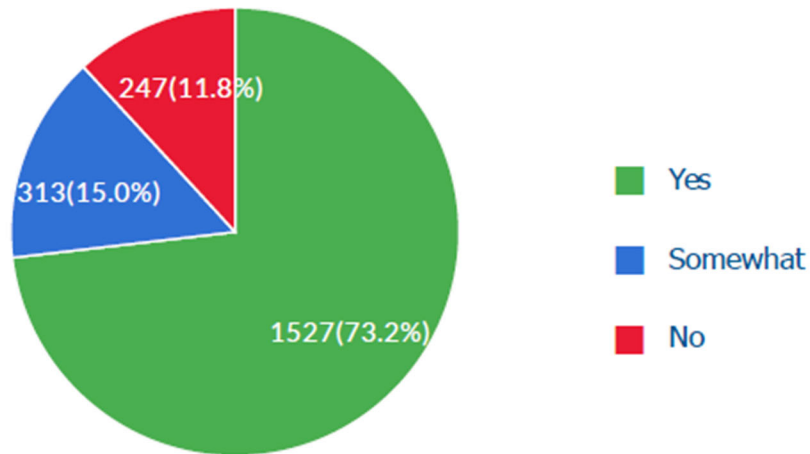
An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Criterion 3 – Access to Courts

The evaluation for this criterion is based on multiple-choice questions using the following scale: Yes, Somewhat, No, or Don't Know/No Opinion.

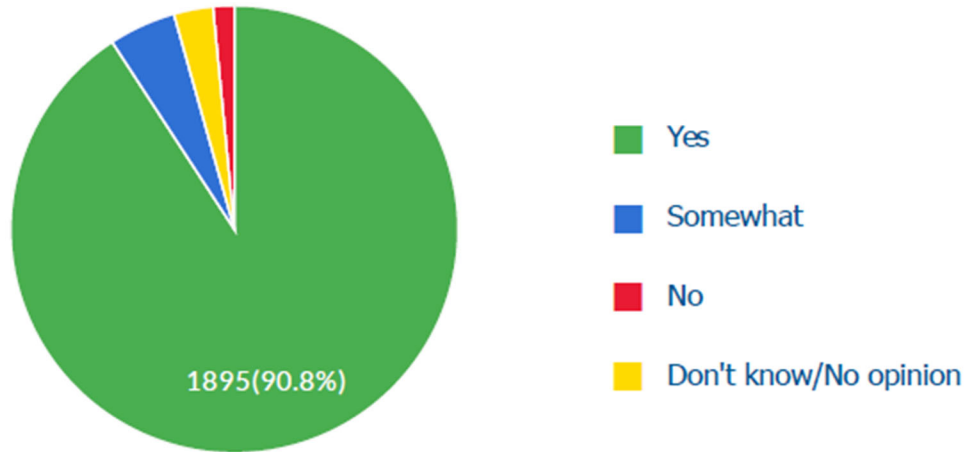
Question 14 – Access to Written Decisions and Other Court Documents

Do you know where to find written documentation of decisions and other court documents from the judicial circuit?



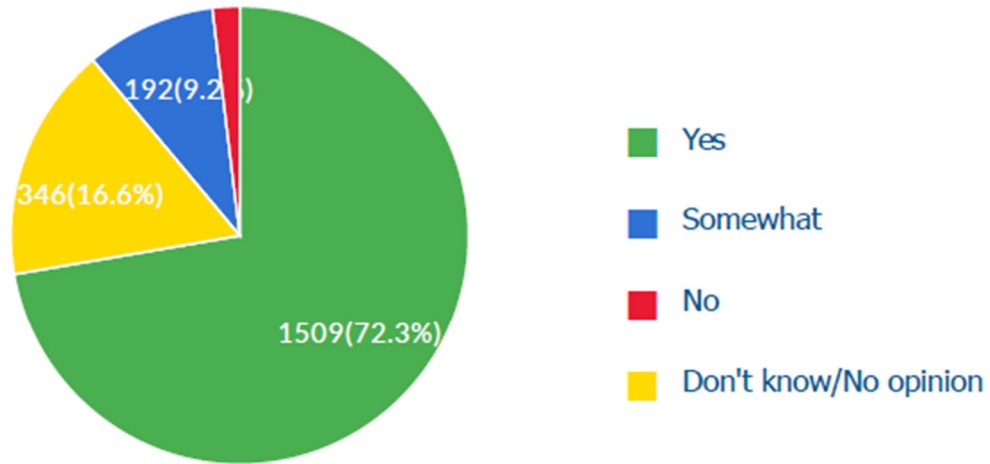
Question 15 – Access to the Courthouse

Do you have reasonable access to the courthouses in the judicial circuit?



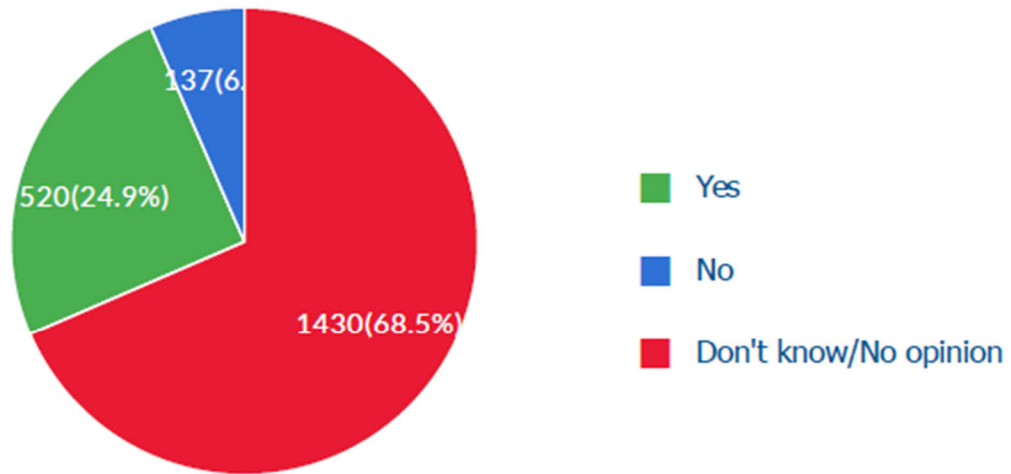
Question 16 – Access to View Files

Do you have reasonable access to view the judicial circuit files (motions, other documents, etc.)?



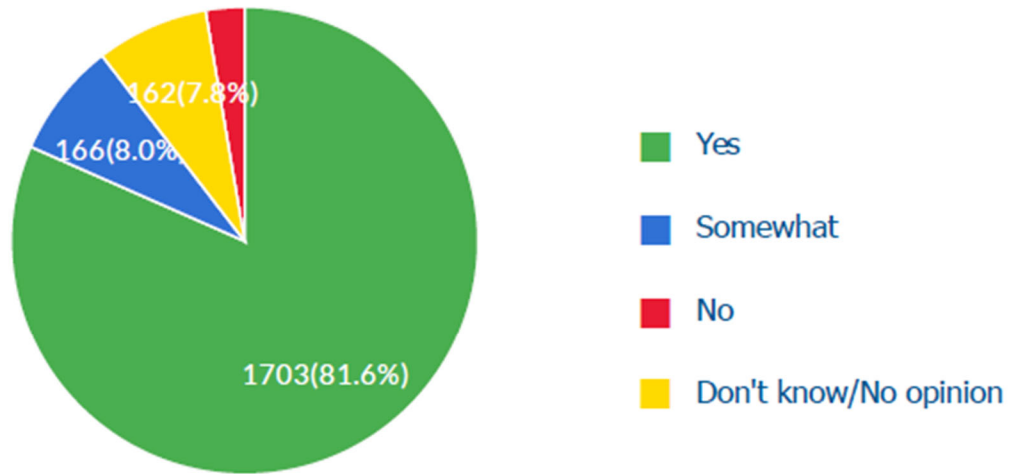
Question 17 – Livestreaming of Court Proceedings

Does the judicial circuit provide livestreaming of court proceedings via the Internet?



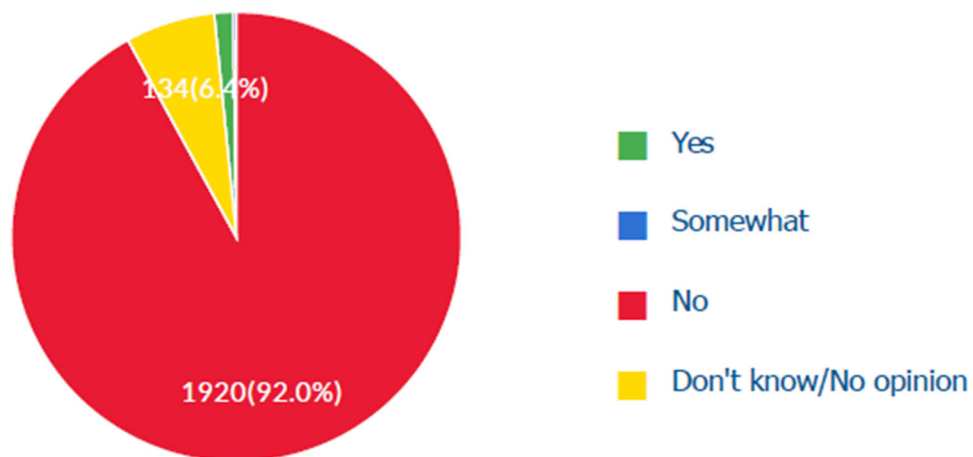
Question 18 – Sufficiency of Access

Do you believe you have sufficient access to hearings, trials, or other court proceedings?



Question 19 – Would Access to Courts Be Improved through Consolidation

Would access to the judicial circuit be improved through consolidation with another judicial circuit?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.” Due to a tabulation issue that could not be resolved before publication of this preliminary report, illustrative comments detailed in this section do not include a tabulation of the number of respondents who provided the same or similar answers.

Analysis of “yes” free responses

28 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 1.3%) answered the question in the affirmative. The comments in favor of consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced public trust and confidence, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “A judiciary based in law has full interest in transparency. The 16th district has no interest in transparency, honesty and law-abiding decisions. Personally, I live in Marathon and could drive 1 1/2 hours to Miami as easily as I presently drive to Key West for non-transparent, unlawful decisions.”
- Resource sharing and economies of scale, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Bigger circuits have more resources.”
 - “Consolidation provides more resources in the end, instead of duplicate resources. It frees up funds that are duplicating efforts. Those funds can be used to make the system more accessible and efficient.”
- Improved efficiency , illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Improved efficiency.”

Additionally, many comments solely referenced previous answers without further explanation or were not responsive to the specific question

Analysis of “somewhat” free responses

5 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 0.2%) answered “somewhat.” Comments to this effect fall into the following broad categories:

- Resource sharing and economies of scale, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Miami-Dade has more resources to fund these sorts of extracurricular things.”

Additionally, some comments were not responsive to the specific question.

Analysis of “no” free responses

1,920 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 92%) answered the question in the negative. The comments opposed to consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Concerns about geography and logistics, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “If the judicial circuits were combined, it's possible that hearings would be held even further away from people's homes than they are now.”
 - “Consolidation with the 16th circuit would mean Keys residents would have to travel 165 miles for access. This is unacceptable.”
 - For the 14th district we'd have to travel significantly further. There is no reason that this district shouldn't have the same access online, but if we have to actually go the proceedings or to the court, then we are losing easier access.”
- Lack of necessity, insufficient evidence, the circuit is currently working well, or consolidation will make no difference, illustrative responses include the following:
 - “Our circuit has sufficient access already. Consolidation would not improve this.”
 - “How could consolidation increase access? It would not solve any area where demand is at its peak!”
 - “Monroe County is fine as it is and should not be consolidated with Dade.”
- Access to courts would be reduced, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation risks limiting the accessibility and availability of court proceedings, as residents, particularly those in rural communities within the smaller circuit, would face increased travel distances and expenses. Moreover, the consolidation

may lead to overcrowded courtrooms, overburdened judicial personnel, and further delays, causing additional hardship and exacerbating the disparities-faced by disadvantaged individuals who seek justice.”

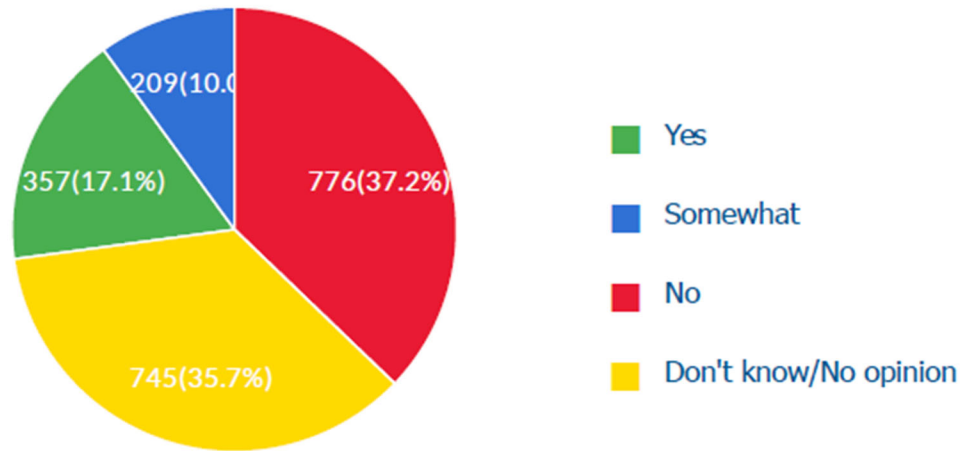
- “The public already has access with the exception of certain confidential documents. There is nothing to be gained through consolidation except the potential loss of access if courthouses are shut down.”
- “Access would be very far away, inconvenient, and possibly impossible to attend and add the burden of the cost of travel (time and money).”
- The circuit is already too large, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Miami is too large of a city for our small islands Judicial system.”
 - “Miami-Dade is beyond capacity already.”
 - “Too heavy a load already.”
- Concerns about increased workload, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Again, to consolidate the circuits would mean that there's more work for fewer staff slowing down the process and creating further backlog.”
 - “Our judicial circuit is fine and consolidation would create delays from adding too many of the insufficient circuit's backlog to our docket.”
 - “How would adding cases to the load improve access?”
- Decreased efficiency, illustrative responses include the following:
 - “Any consolidation requires extra time and extra work to have matters move smoothly through the bogged court system.”
 - “Consolation decreases efficiency in this matter. Not a good idea at all!!!”

- Uniqueness of the circuit’s geography, demographics, or culture, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We are in a very specific place in the Florida Keys. It would be a logistic nightmare to move our circuit as we are so far away from the mainland with many obstacles that can affect our service.”
 - “We ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM our surrounding large cities.”
- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Gerrymandering power grab.”
 - “Consolidation really just represents the government becoming bigger and less personal.”
- Loss of community connection, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The courts run efficiently and judges know the community.”
 - “No knowledge of the local specifics.”
- Insufficient resources and staffing concerns, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The courtrooms would be fuller.”
- Loss of local representation, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “If we were to have less representation in our judicial circuit, we would have less access to our local judges and court system.”

Additionally, many comments solely referenced previous answers without further explanation or were not responsive to the specific question.

Question 20 – Would Access to Courts Be Improved by Administrative Changes

Would access to the judicial circuit be improved by administrative changes (e.g., deploy new technology, increase ratios of support staff per judge, create branch locations, create subject matter divisions, add geographic divisions, etc.)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

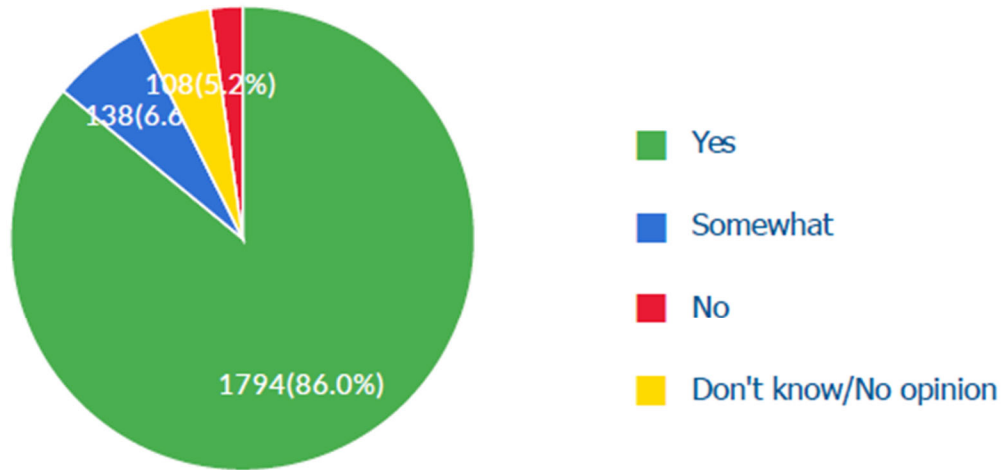
An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Criterion 4 – Professionalism

The evaluation for this criterion is based on multiple-choice questions using the following scale: Yes, Somewhat, No, or Don't Know/No Opinion.

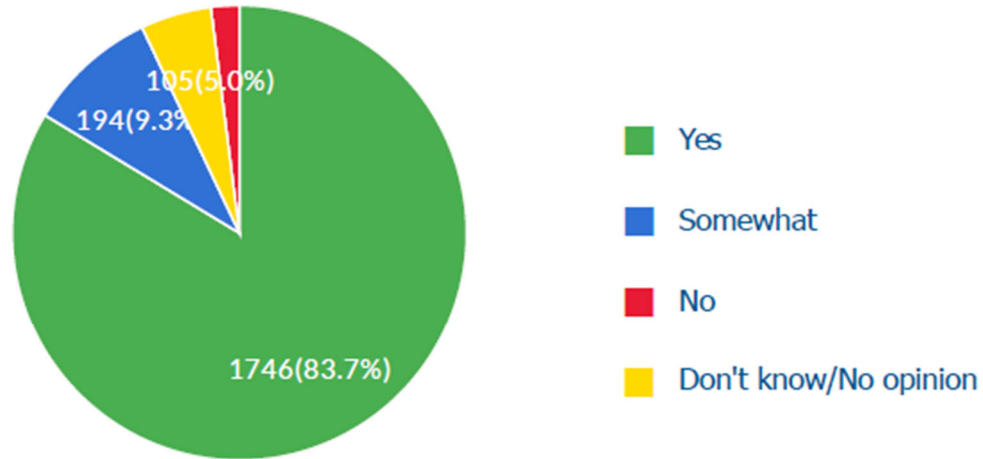
Question 21 – Dignity and Respect

Do you believe the judicial circuit's judges and court staff treat people with respect?



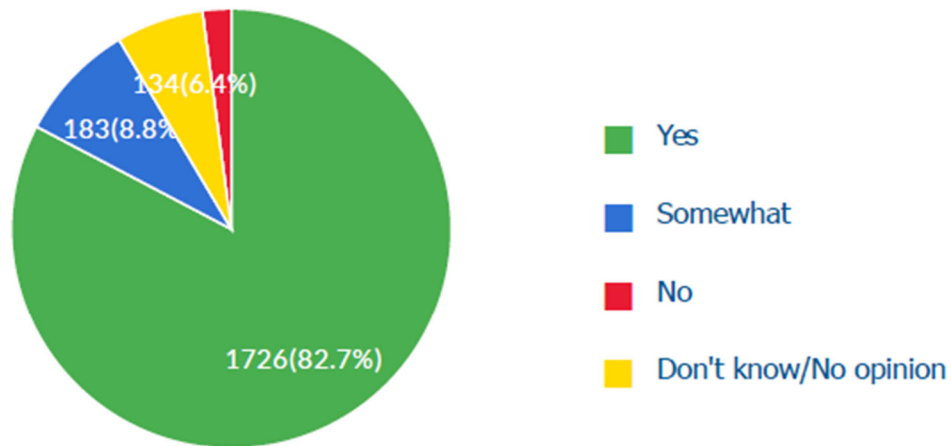
Question 22 – Qualified Staff

Do you believe the judicial circuit's judges and court staff are highly skilled and able to perform their duties well?



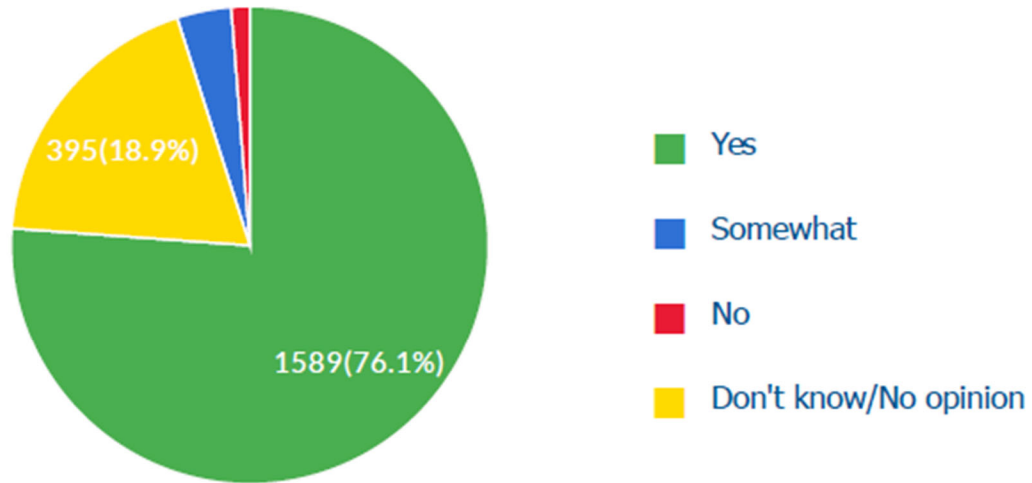
Question 23 – Helpful Staff

Do you believe the court staff at the judicial circuit are helpful (e.g., answer questions, provide necessary information, etc.)?



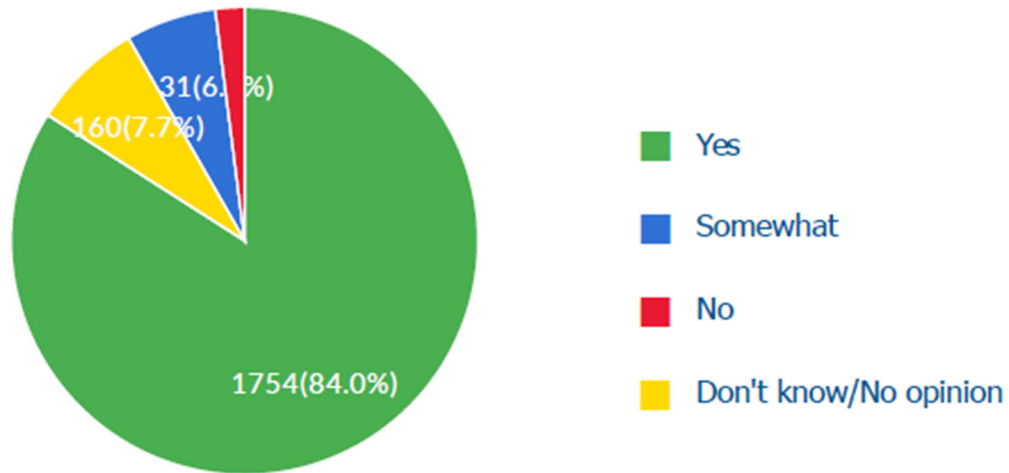
Question 24 – Judges Stay Abreast of Changes in the Law

Do the judges in the judicial circuit stay abreast of changes in the law?



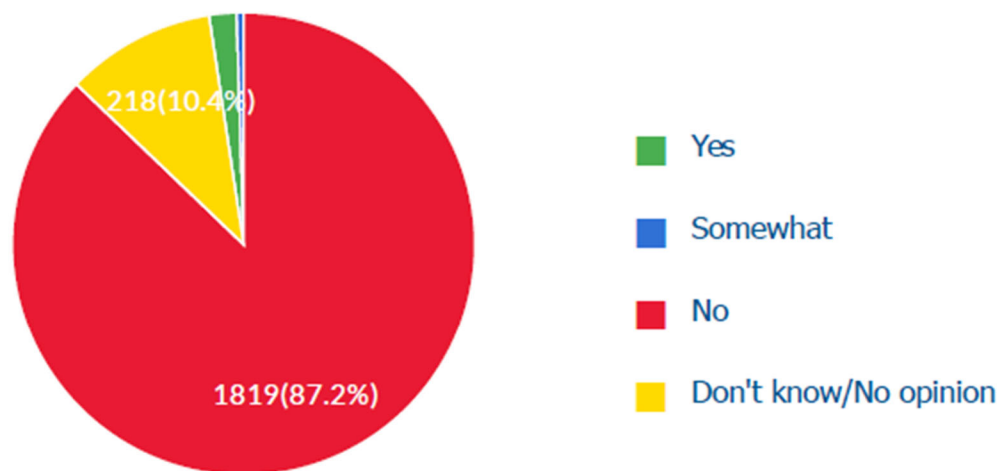
Question 25 – Decisions Demonstrate Judges are Knowledgeable and Qualified

Do you believe the decisions demonstrate that judges are educated, knowledgeable of the law, and qualified?



Question 26 – Would Professionalism Be Improved through Consolidation

Would the professionalism of the judicial circuit be improved through consolidation with another judicial circuit?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

Analysis of “yes” free responses

40 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 1.9%) answered the question in the affirmative. The comments in favor of consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced public trust and confidence (10 responses), illustrative comments include the following:

- “Cronyism, nepotism and unqualified leadership would end.”
- “More hands on from different departments would make other more accountable for their action, job, how they treat the general public.”
- More qualified applicants for judicial vacancies (8 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I guess the probability of a diligent and professional judge presiding would increase for residents of De Soto, Manatee and Sarasota if consolidated with a different circuit’s judges.”
- Enhanced professionalism (6 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Maybe they would act professionally for once.”
- Additional resources should be allocated (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “For all the reasons I’ve listed previously. Fresh eyes on local issues, more resources and colleagues to consult with, less duplication of basic processes frees up funding that can be used to better serve the public.”
- Resource sharing and economies of scale (2 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “More, pooled, resources - that is - judges.”
- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy (1 response):
 - “There would be less political/financial influence on the judiciary system here if local control was reduced.”

Additionally, some comments were not responsive to the specific question (6 responses) or solely referenced previous answers without further explanation (1 response).

Analysis of “somewhat” free responses

10 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 0.5%) answered “somewhat.” Comments to this effect fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced professionalism and greater uniformity (6 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Training and experience applies to all.”
- Improved efficiency, resource sharing, economies of scale (1 response):
 - “It is possible that being able to choose from a larger pool of experts could result in more efficient and fair proceedings.”

Additionally, some respondents provided an answer that was not responsive to the specific question (2 responses).

Analysis of “no” free responses

1,819 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 87.2%) answered the question in the negative. The comments opposed to consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Lack of necessity, insufficient evidence, the circuit is currently working well, or consolidation will make no difference (562 responses), illustrative responses include the following:

- “Why would it be better? It is working well now.”
- “Absurd question, location has nothing to do with knowledge.”
- “There is not a problem currently.”
- Loss of community connection (174 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation would reduce the local collaboration and professional networking that helps judges and other staff keep up with changes within law and policy.”
 - “Our judges, and the entire staff of all of the court houses are people who are within the community that understand this community.”
 - “Local judges know the local community.”
- Loss of local representation (119 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We would lose the right to elect our judicial officials.”
 - “Monroe County will never have a Monroe County judge again if the court were part of Miami Dade. Easy decision. The courts work well today with the Sheriff. Can you imagine jury duty being 100 plus miles away?”
 - “There is nothing good that can come from taking the representation of the people, and moving it to a place they cannot easily access.”
- Uniqueness of the circuit’s geography, demographics, or culture (118 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “This does not make sense for the area we live in that has different types of issues and limitations to consolidate with an area not similar. Taking into consideration the distance to be able to travel easily to take care of judicial problems. The new judicial circuit not having similarities to our unique demographic. This would cause a lot of restriction in our area when it comes to simple timely things that need to be taken care of immediately that has to do with our economy. For example what

would happen to those who are coming to Key West to get married and they need to get a marriage license. This alone would be a major restriction on our economy and would affect a lot of businesses. This would not make sense for our population who a majority do not have transportation or the means to travel a far distance to take care of judicial matters. This would also create unnecessary travel backups/problems to an already stressed road system. We need to have our own elected judges for our unique demographic that would not be the same as a large city.”

- “Different circuits- different issues.”
- “No we are a very small community with unique problems.”
- Concerns about geography, logistics, and access to courts (100 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Travel time is not feasible.”
 - “Because Miami-Dade County is too far for Key West residents to travel to. It’s a 6-hour round trip and [you] reasonable[y] to expect residents to make that drive[?]”
 - “Residents of the Florida Keys would face significant hardships having to travel long distances to attend court hearings or access essential legal services in Miami-Dade. Access to courthouse staff and essential courtroom services could be adversely affected if the Supreme Court and Florida Legislature approve the consolidation of some judicial circuits, including Monroe County’s circuit into Miami-Dade’s circuit.”
- Concerns about local systems/processes and loss of local accountability (89 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Local control is essential for a quality judiciary.”
 - “Loss of home rule.”
 - “Accountability to the local community is critical. When one of the local judges in my divorce case demonstrated an unprofessional familiarity with one of the

attorneys (from Miami) and appeared to be willing to compromise her judicial ethics to the detriment of both parties, we were able to hold the judge accountable and have her removed from the case. That would have likely not been possible had this been a judge from outside the community colluding with a lawyer due to the inevitable long distance bureaucratic stonewalling.”

- Decreased professionalism (83 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I would not consider staff in Monroe County as less professional as staff in Miami-Dade. Consolidation might lower our level of professionalism.”
 - “I don’t see how professionalism would be improved through a consolidation. If anything, Miami’s judicial circuit appears to be less professional.”
 - “The judge should be LOCAL and outside of their area would impede their professionalism.”
- Concerns about increased workload (48 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It is difficult to maintain professionalism if you are overwhelmed, which would be the result of consolidation.”
 - “Greater workload would cause less care.”
 - “I don’t believe consolidation would improve any of the above questions, it would do more harm and overload the circuit to where we would not get the same level of service we now receive.”
- The circuit is already too large (30 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Adding more cases to an already overloaded system does not breed professionalism. Frustrations by all parties, due to the hardships, will not breed professionalism.”

- “Because it’s more work and they already behind on their load. Overworked staff will lead to frustration.”
- “They seem to be operating at capacity and should not take on additional areas.”
- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy (29 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Combing the courts does not serve the people and is judicial gerrymandering.”
 - “Consolidation is a power grab and hurts the rights of the people and is a threat to democracy.”
- Decreased efficiency (24 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “Cause public confusion and case backlog.”
 - “Furthermore, a larger, centralized system might introduce bureaucratic complexities that hinder efficient case management. Delays in scheduling hearings or accessing records could undermine the timely and orderly conduct of proceedings, ultimately impacting the perception of professionalism.”
 - “It would be chaos. Overworked system, less concern with the local issues.”
- Insufficient resources and staffing concerns (20 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I think they would end up being overworked and most staff would quit.”
 - “Combining the Monroe County judicial circuit with another would put unnecessary strain on the staff of the judicial circuit because it would divide their efforts to meet the needs of two very different counties and their very different residents.”
- Decreased effectiveness (17 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Absolutely NO. Merging with a larger county would cause each case to be cared about less/feel a need to shuffle through cases faster, as well as take longer to

receive a court date for any offender OR innocent person. That is not a speedy trial and Monroe County DOES make sure court cases are EFFICIENTLY looked through and attended to in a timely manner.”

- “Increasing workload will diminish the effectiveness and care.”
- Increase the number of circuits, judges, or resources (15 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We need more judges, more oversight, more fairness, more accountability. Giving more power to a select handful is NOT what we need.”
 - “Better to not make fewer circuits. Probably need more with Florida's increasing population.”
 - “Based upon my observations of operations across all judicial circuits, the workload seems to support an INCREASE in judicial circuits and not a consolidation/decrease. Consolidation would increase the workload of the remaining circuits and would make the Florida courts appear LESS PROFESSIONAL. This has the appearance of being a politically motivated action against certain individuals within the court system which will actually hurt the regular citizens of the state by increasing backlogs and travel distances.”
- Reduced public trust and confidence (14 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “There [would be] no trust between the constituents and the elected officials because the circuit would be entirely too big.”
 - “To maintain public confidence you need to keep the courts close to where people live and residents must have their voices heard.”

- Increased costs (10 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The consolidation could lead to severe logistical challenges for all stakeholders involved in the judicial process. Residents of the Florida Keys would face significant hardships having to travel long distances to attend court hearings or access essential legal services in Miami-Dade. This could result in delays, increased costs, and potentially a lack of representation for some individuals (especially the indigent), further exacerbating disparities in access to justice.”
 - “Neither financially nor time efficient.”
- Current case management practices/efficiencies would be jeopardized (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Adverse impact on case load management. Diminished expertise and skills diversity. Loss of accessibility and localized knowledge. Resource allocation disparities.”
- Concerns about the quality of applicants for judicial vacancies (1 response):
 - “Quality of applicants in a larger circuit, where pay is lower would mostly likely not be as qualified.”
- Demographic and geographic diversity of applicants for judicial vacancies (1 response):
 - “Consolidation would decrease the diversity of judges within the judicial circuit. Therefore, one ineffective or unknowledgeable judge would have a much larger negative impact on victims and clients within a consolidated circuit. A non-consolidated circuit limits the negative impact of one such judge and provides voters with more frequent opportunities to vote out ineffective or unknowledgeable judges.”

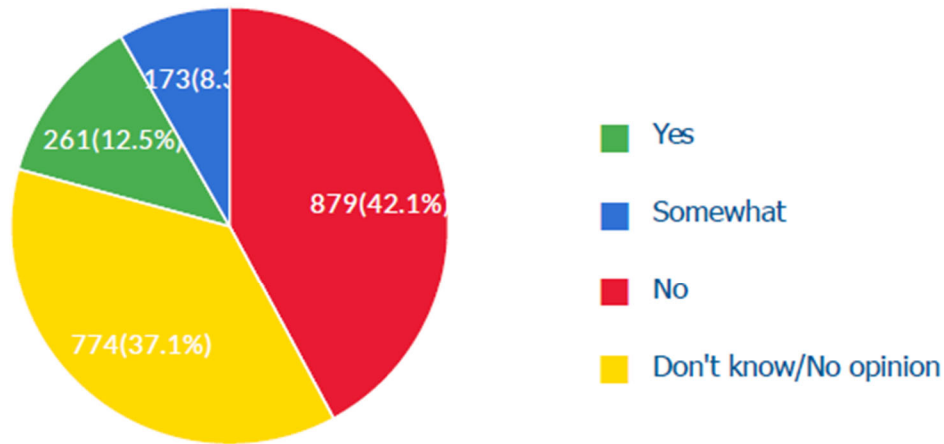
- Data systems and technical challenges (1 response):
“Eliminating 15 of 20 circuit [j]udicial [d]istricts would increase taxes in the form of consolidation of technology both front-end and back-end. Would increase commute times for employees and litigants, witnesses, etc.”

Additionally, many respondents solely referenced previous answers without further explanation (116 responses) or were not responsive to the specific question (112 responses).

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Question 27 – Would Professionalism Be Improved by Administrative Changes

Would the professionalism of the judicial circuit be improved by administrative changes (e.g., deploy new technology, increase ratios of support staff per judge, create branch locations, create subject matter divisions, add geographic divisions, etc.)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

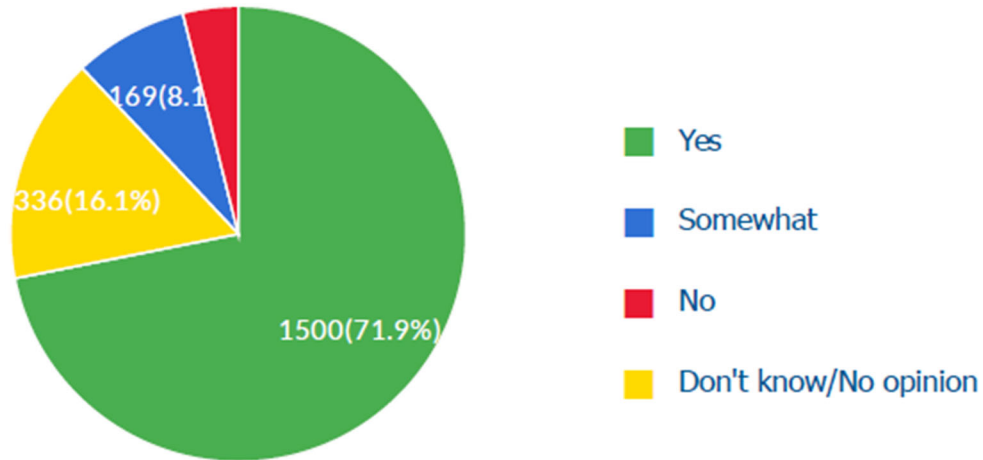
An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Criterion 5 – Public Trust & Confidence

The evaluation for this criterion is based on multiple-choice questions using the following scale: Yes, Somewhat, No, or Don't Know/No Opinion.

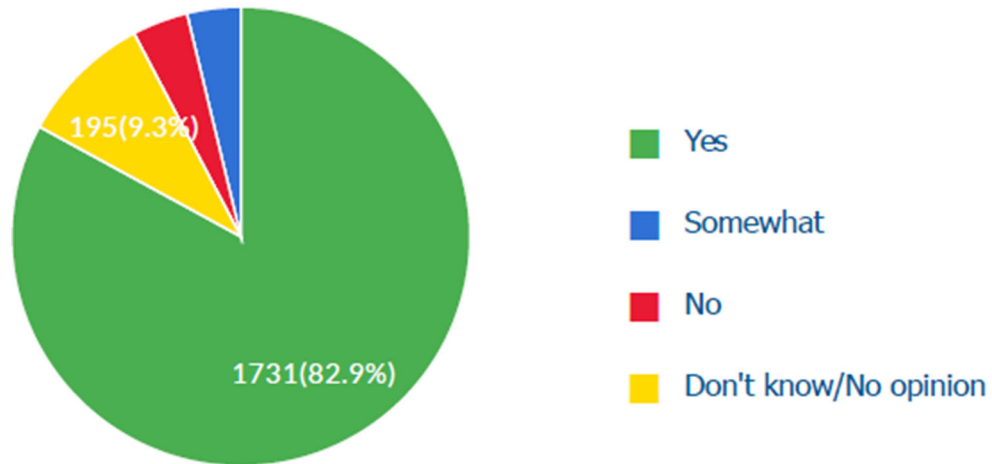
Question 28 – Community Involvement

Are the judges in your judicial circuit sufficiently involved in the community?



Question 29 – Size and Geographic Boundaries

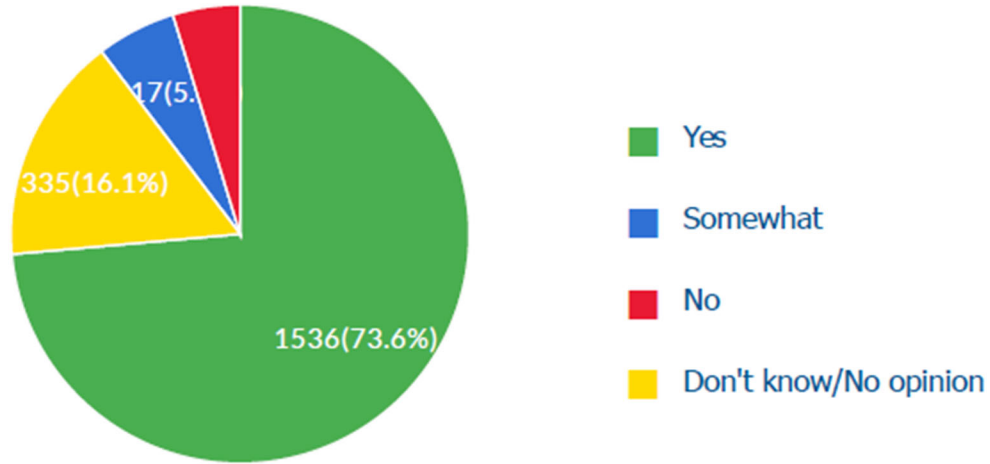
Do you believe the size and geographic boundaries of the judicial circuit foster public trust and confidence?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.” An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Question 30 – Demographic Composition

Do you believe the demographic composition of the judicial circuit fosters public trust and confidence?

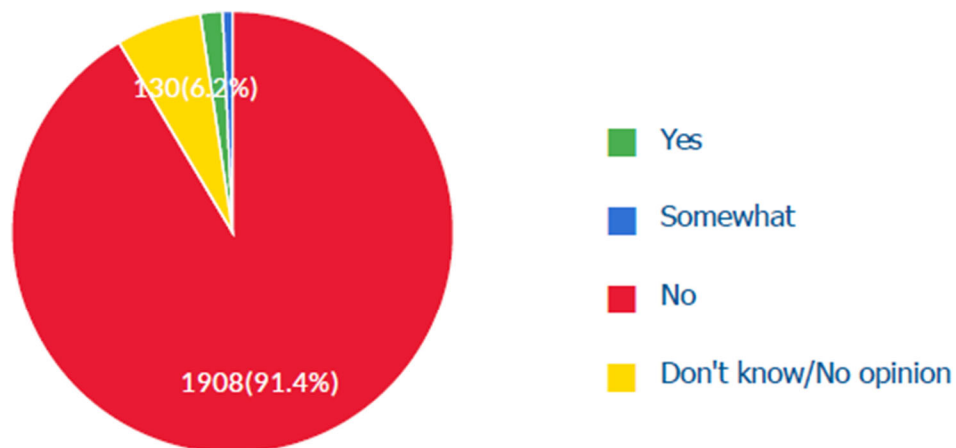


Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Question 31 – Would Public Trust & Confidence Be Improved through Consolidation

Would the public trust and confidence of the judicial circuit be improved through consolidation with another judicial circuit?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes” or “no.”

Analysis of “yes” free responses

34 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 1.6%) answered the question in the affirmative. The comments in favor of consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced public trust and confidence (8 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation would put more emphasis in removing biased decision making.”

- “Hopefully the public would see new faces behind the bench from time to time, ones that aren’t influenced by local issues, but instead follow the letter of the law.”
- Enhanced professionalism (4 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I think if we had confidence that we were going before a judge that absolutely did not know you or anything about you our outlook on the whole system would change. Monroe County is small and everyone knows everyone else, with that being said, I feel judges are being swayed by what they know of certain individuals in the community and this should hold no weight on the outcome of a ruling from a judge.”
 - “By consolidating the 16th circuit into Dade County, the number of judges would increase and lack of local influence on these judges would allow for fair legal decisions.”
- Additional resources should be allocated (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “More resources, meeting more judges, increases the chance for judges with involvement with the local non-business, nonlegal community.”

Additionally, a few comments were not responsive to the specific question (4 responses).

Analysis of “somewhat” free responses

15 out of 2,078 respondents (approx. 0.7%) answered “somewhat.” Comments to this effect fall into the following broad categories:

- Improved efficiency (3 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Potentially, but it could also overwhelm the system here by undoing the fine balance this circuit juggles with its current makeup.”

Additionally, a few respondents provided an answer that was not responsive to the specific question (2 responses).

Analysis of “no” free responses

1,908 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 91.4%) answered the question in the negative. The comments opposed to consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Reduced public trust and confidence (346 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I believe this would only create a negative impact on public trust.”
 - “Public trust and confidence would not be improved with consolidation as the voting power of our local citizens will be diluted, and our area will never be able to elect a local State Attorney, Public Defender, or Circuit Judge.”
 - “Nope! You’re going to lose the public trust of Monroe County citizens if you meld us into Miami-Dade. Part of the reason we moved to the Florida Keys was because of the sense of community and this would hasten its demise.”
- Loss of local representation (192 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We trust local representation.”
 - “I know about and vote for the people in our small county.”
 - “Consolidation would result in officials that are less representative of the people. The public is more likely to have trust and confidence from someone that they can relate to someone that lives in their area.”

- “Our judges are elected locally. They reside in and are invested in our communities. They share the values of our community. By consolidating with other circuits the values of one circuit can be watered down by another.”
- Loss of community connection (173 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Locals need to serve locals. It is what fosters a community.”
 - “Consolidation means further removing the judicial circuit personnel from the community it will be serving. The Florida Keys is not an urban environment. Consolidation makes the district bigger and the local needs of the Florida Keys residents will be lost together with public trust and confidence in a judicial circuit from an urban background staffed with strangers to the Florida Keys.”
 - “Judges and members of the court system should reflect our community and our values. This is why we vote for our justices and [State] Attorneys.”
- Lack of necessity, insufficient evidence, the circuit is currently working well, or consolidation will make no difference (170 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “I don’t see the correlation.”
 - “It is fine the way it is.”
 - “Consolidation with another judicial circuit would not improve my trust and confidence, since I think making changes only for change's sake, is illogical. I subscribe to the old adage ‘If it isn't broken, don't fix it.’”

- Uniqueness of the circuit’s geography, demographics, or culture (119 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The unique culture and demographic composition would be significantly degraded if removed from the islands and consolidated into mainland Miami/Dade. Such a consolidation would be detrimental to the trust of the citizens of Monroe County.”
 - “If the geographic area of the judicial circuit were expanded, the public would be served by some individuals who do not embody the demographics of their community. This would create doubt and fear within the public that the judicial circuit does not adequately represent or have an interest in them.”
 - “Monroe County has its unique circumstances and it is surrounded by the waters of the Florida Keys national marine sanctuary. It is important for the judges in our judicial circuit to be cognizant of the challenges of upholding the laws that pertain to the resources of this geographical region. If you do not live in Monroe County then you do not understand the importance of balancing a tourist economy with a federal natural resource and a working full-time population.”

- Concerns about geography, logistics, and access to courts (89 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It is too far to drive, it will make it worse.”
 - “Increasing distance to constituents would only increase dissatisfaction.”
 - “The Keys are over three hours from Miami. There is no benefit to Monroe County for this change - will only hinder legal process in the Keys.”

- The circuit is already too large (63 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “To make something that is already too big, bigger is just folly, and would only make things worse.”

- “The judicial circuits are overwhelmed and are unable to be active members of society and gain public trust. Consolidating the courts would make this worse. The courts need to be expanded.”
- “It would be too large for there to be trust and confidence in a massive circuit.”
- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy (42 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It would be lessened because the consolidation means more government control.”
 - “I guarantee it would just result in the percentage of the judiciary that are white male republicans increasing dramatically. People won’t trust institutions that don’t represent them demographically.”
 - “Consolidation is a way to isolate power to a few individuals and allow politics to influence decisions.”
- Decreased efficiency (28 responses), illustrative responses include the following:
 - “Will just add complexity.”
 - “I believe consolidation would foster chaos for Monroe County residents.”
- Concerns about increased workload (19 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Increased workload would reduce the public's perception of the court's abilities to operate in the public's interest.”
 - “This would overload the system causing public to not trust outcomes being pushed through since they would be so backlogged.”
- Decreased effectiveness (9 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Smaller municipalities allow those of all demographics to participate in the criminal justice process. If you consolidate, those who are victims of crimes will not

travel 2 hours or more, some don't have the ability to. Less participation = less convictions.”

- “Absolutely not. As [for] the Conch Republic, there is not a lot of public trust and confidence outside of Monroe County within its residents. I believe there would be so many problems and issues that arise if we were combined with another judicial circuit that efficiency and effectiveness would significantly decrease for both areas.”
- Concerns about local systems/processes and loss of local accountability (6 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Our local community of Monroe County is a unique mix of people and geography. Our justices must come from that community. It would be inappropriate for our justices to decide cases for Miami’s community, just as it would be inappropriate for Miami to judge our cases. Our challenges, cultures and communities are very different. Additionally, this keeps our judges and their bureaucracy accountable to our community, and where there is enforceable accountability, there can be trust and confidence in public officials. Without that local accountability, such trust and confidence is severely diminished.”
 - “No, it would be worse because the Miami judicial circuit already treats matters that are strictly enforced in Monroe County with a lesser degree of severity and accountability.”
- Increased costs (6 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “As noted previously, consolidation contravenes the principles of decentralized governance and adds unnecessary complexity and costs to an already overburdened tax base.”

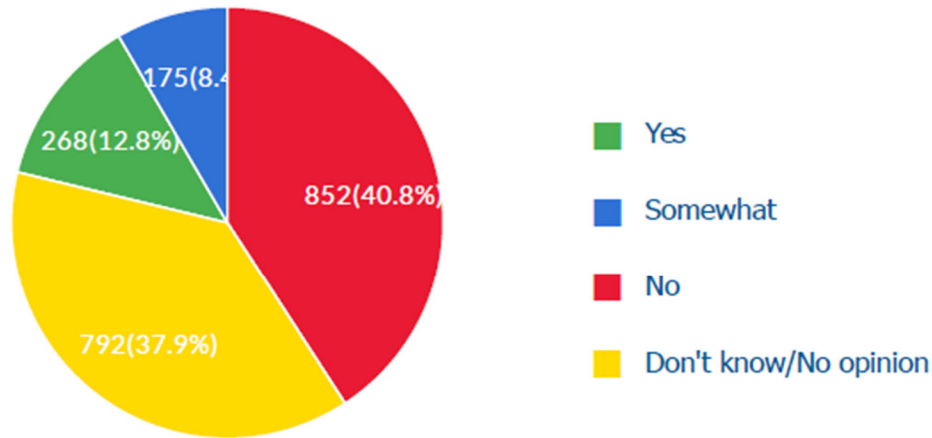
- Insufficient resources and staffing concerns (5 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The circuit would become overworked and understaffed.”
 - “Again, consolidating would decrease the judiciary and it's staff causing less access to justice.”
- Data systems and technical challenges (2 responses), illustrative comments include the following:
 - “All the reasons I have stated numerous times before. Longer commute times, increased caseload, and high cost of technology integration.”
- Increase the number of circuits, judges, or resources (1 response):
 - “If anything there should be smaller circuits, not less.”

Additionally, many respondents solely referenced previous answers without further explanation (191 responses) or were not responsive to the specific question (57 responses).

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Question 32 – Would Public Trust & Confidence Be Improved by Administrative Changes

Would the public trust and confidence in the judicial circuit be improved by administrative changes (e.g., deploy new technology, increase ratios of support staff per judge, create branch locations, create subject matter divisions, add geographic divisions, etc.)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

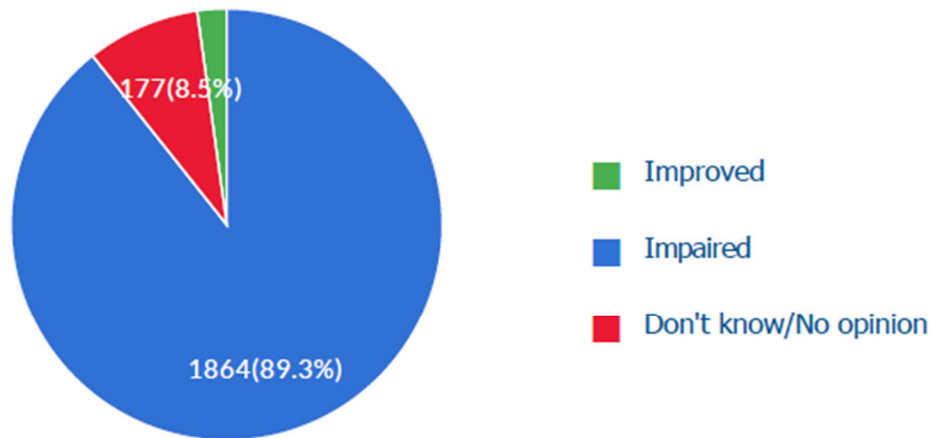
An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Criterion 6 – Additional Factors

The evaluation for this criterion encompasses multiple choice questions asking respondents to evaluate the performance of the relevant judicial circuit regarding the factors for assessing the need for additional trial court judges as set forth in Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. 2.240(b)(1) and (c).

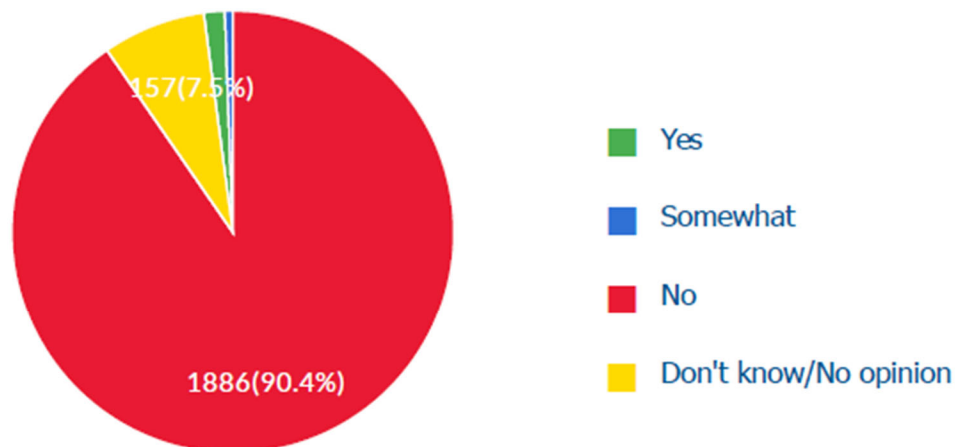
Question 33 – Prosecutorial Practices & Law Enforcement Activities

Would prosecutorial practices and law enforcement activities within your judicial circuit be improved or impaired by consolidation of the judicial circuit with another judicial circuit?



Question 34 – Do any Additional Factors Suggest the Need to Consolidate

Do any of the additional factors noted above suggest the need to consolidate the judicial circuit with another judicial circuit?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.” Due to a tabulation issue that could not be resolved before publication of this preliminary report, illustrative comments detailed in this section do not include a tabulation of the number of respondents who provided the same or similar answers.

Analysis of “yes” free responses

32 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 1.5%) answered the question in the affirmative. The comments in favor of consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Enhanced public trust and confidence, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “If a court away from the Keys could take caseloads and see what people are being arraigned for, maybe someone would come down and investigate what is actually going on down here. The entire system is out of hand, the police officers are three on one person being pulled over for speeding, they are intimidating our young kids by telling them they will be detained if they aren’t allowed to search their vehicles (mind you they have no standing to even think about searching their vehicles.) They are pulling our kids over and stating they thought it was someone else driving the car, it’s completely out of control and harassment down here in the Keys.”
- Improved efficiency, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “It increases efficiency in the system, it reduces redundancy, which will save taxpayers money and speed up the legal system.”
- Concerns about geography, logistics, and access to courts, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation boundaries should consider the rush hour transit times (not distance) of its jury pool.”
- Additional resources should be allocated, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Better access to training, additional resources and community weigh ins. Broaden their perspectives.”

Additionally, several comments were not responsive to the specific question or solely referenced previous answers without further explanation.

Analysis of “somewhat” free responses

12 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 0.6%) answered “somewhat.” Comments to this effect fall into the following broad categories:

- Concerns about geography, logistics, and access to courts , illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Our county has a high cost of living; it is possible that things could be made more efficient by having a larger pool of experts. I don't know how the logistics would work unless everything was done electronically. It would be interesting to know if any other U.S. judicial systems are working entirely remotely and if that is successful.”
- Additional resources should be allocated to address case backlog , illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We do need additional judges in Bay County to increase availability for jury trials.”

Analysis of “no” free responses

1,886 out of 2,087 respondents (approx. 90.4%) answered the question in the negative. The comments opposed to consolidation fall into the following broad categories:

- Lack of necessity, insufficient evidence, the circuit is currently working well, or consolidation will make no difference, illustrative responses include the following:
 - “There is no need to consolidate circuits at this time. They are all working just fine.”

- “There is NO evidence that consolidation would improve trust and confidence or any of the other matters brought up. With the current system we do have some knowledge of the attorneys, but with a larger consolidated system that is not likely.”
- “Why would you try to fix something that isn't broken?”
- Concerns about geography, logistics, and access to courts, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Adding more courthouses and more divisions only requires more travel for lawyers and litigants.”
 - “The travel times between courthouses would be too great for many of the locals here.”
 - “Making us travel 200 miles away would harm our community.”
- Uniqueness of the circuit’s geography, demographics, or culture, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We have different needs out of the judicial system than Miami-Dade.”
 - “There are too many issues that are strictly local Keys issues that people who live on the mainland would not fully-understand and ‘our’ issues would be over shadowed.”
 - “Because Key West is a fragile & unique ecosystem.”
- Concerns about local systems/processes and loss of local accountability, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Case overload, time it would take for a case to be seen, and unfamiliarity of all the aspects of a different district.”
 - “Our systems down here work just fine. We don’t need outside the country telling us what to do.”

- The circuit is already too large, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “We have a big enough population already.”
 - “Dade County system is already overwhelmed.”
 - “It sounds [like] it would put more strain on an already struggling circuit in Miami.”

- Loss of community connection, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Our sense of community would be nonexistent if this consolidation were to take place. The state government would take a severe likeability hit if this were to happen. Don't do it!”
 - “We love our law enforcement and again they are part of the community with deep understanding of its people.”
 - “Having a local circuit to support functions in our community would improve the above factors while merging with a larger, different circuit disconnect from our community would impede it.”

- Concerns about increased workload, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “The volume of case load merging with Miami-Dade County completely impaired by consolidating with overloaded cases.”
 - “Consolidation would lead to increased workloads, longer travel times, increased crime, and fewer law enforcement and emergency services personnel. Consolidation is unacceptable!”
 - “Case load and workload would increase adding a strain to the system and lower public trust.”

- Concerns about politicization and bureaucracy, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “I see no reason to consolidate. It will make everything more bureaucratic and less responsive to individual communities.”

- “This seems more political than an exercise in efficiency.”
- Reduced public trust and confidence, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation would erode public trust and leave Monroe County with no voice.”
- Decreased efficiency, illustrative responses include the following:
 - “Lack of efficiencies.”
- Insufficient resources and staffing concerns, illustrative comments include the following:
 - “Consolidation with other circuits serves to water down the values of the communities involved. If services in one circuit are not being utilized and other circuits have greater needs a redistribution of resources is in order. Additional elections for judges in the communities where the need is greater allowing for local judges to fill the needed openings.”

Additionally, many respondents solely referenced previous answers without further explanation or were not responsive to the specific question.

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Question 35 – Do any Additional Factors Suggest the Need for Administrative Changes

Do any of the additional factors noted above suggest the need for administrative changes within the judicial circuit (e.g., deploy new technology, increase ratios of support staff per judge, create branch locations, create subject matter divisions, add geographic divisions, etc.)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

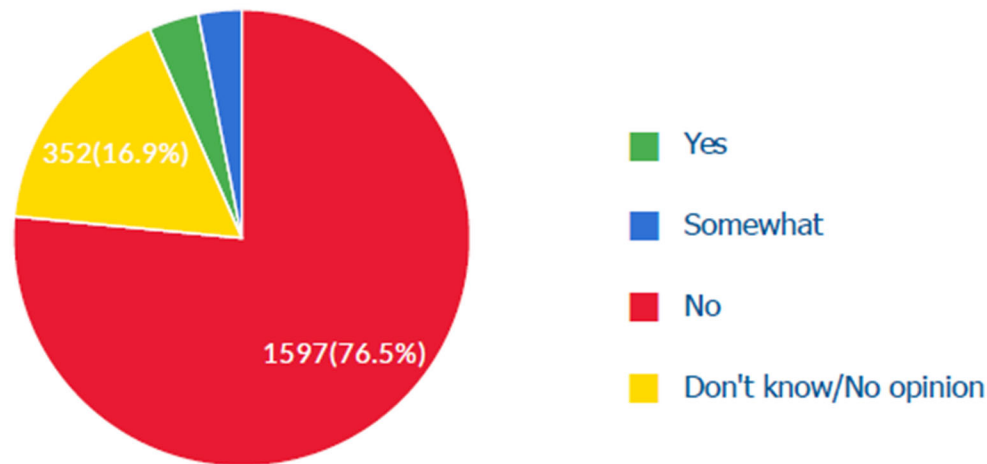
An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Additional Questions

In addition to questions relating to the six criteria set forth in Fla. R. Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin 2.241, respondents were asked several other questions.

Question 36 – Cost Savings

Do you believe that cost savings could be realized by consolidating the state's judicial circuits?

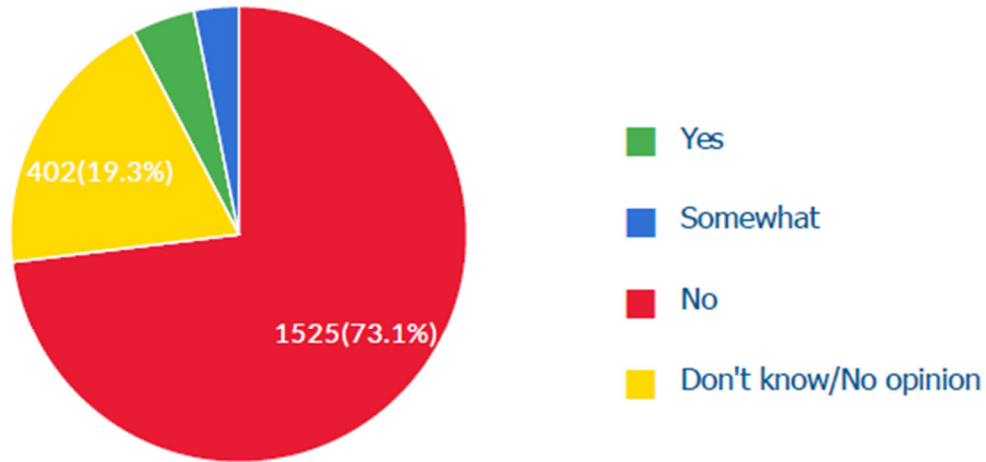


Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Question 37 – Uniformity

Do you believe that consolidation of the state's judicial circuits would result in increased uniformity for court users?

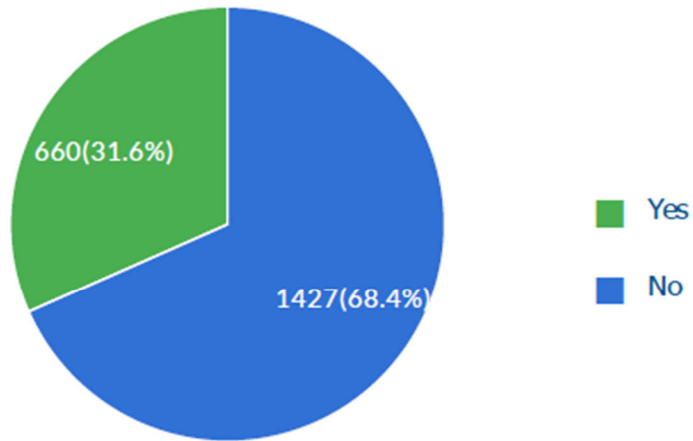


Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes,” “somewhat,” or “no.”

An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Question 38 – Less Disruptive Adjustments

Do you have any suggestions for less disruptive adjustments than consolidating judicial circuits to achieve any or all of the goals stated above (e.g., effectiveness, efficiency, access, professionalism, or public trust and confidence)?



Respondents were asked to explain why they answered “yes.”

An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Question 39 – Other Information

Respondents were asked “what other information do you think should be considered in evaluating the issue of whether to consolidate judicial circuits?”

An analysis of the free responses to this question will be forthcoming.

Proposals for Consolidation

In accordance with [Fla. Admin Order. No. AOSC23-35](#), the survey asked respondents to recommend proposals for consolidating judicial circuits within the existing district court of appeal (DCA) boundaries. The numbers in parentheses indicate the numbers of respondents who proposed each consolidation. It should be noted that these figures may not be reflective of the final total, as OSCA staff continues to review the remaining free responses.

Proposed Consolidations within existing DCA boundaries

Respondents proposed the following specific consolidations within existing DCA boundaries:

- 1st circuit with the 14th circuit (1 respondent).
- 2nd circuit with the 14th circuit (3 respondents).
- 11th circuit with the 16th circuit (3 respondents).

Other Proposed Consolidations

One respondent proposed merging Leon and Gadsden Counties into the 14th circuit.