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## **Governor Appoints Pinellas Judge Carassas To State Commission on Open Government**

CLEARWATER – Pinellas County Judge John Carassas has been appointed by Gov. Charlie Crist to serve on the nine-member statewide Commission on Open Government, which will evaluate the public’s access to government meetings and records.

Carassas said he is “honored to serve on a commission that will perform an important service for the citizens of Florida. It’s obvious that the Governor thinks this subject is important because one of his first official acts after his inauguration was an executive order that created the Office of Open Government.”

That office is designed to help Floridians access information about state government and ensure that government’s actions are always transparent and accountable to taxpayers. Another order created the Commission on Open Government. Among issues to be considered by the commission are:

- Relevance and redundancy of all exemptions to government meetings and records;
- Fees and charges imposed for inspecting and copying public records in light of advances in information technology;
- Collection, storage, retrieval, dissemination and accessibility of public records through advanced technologies, including Internet access;
- Current policies regarding the public’s right to participate in agency meetings subject to the Sunshine Law, including, but not limited to, the right to speak at meetings and whether such meetings conducted through the use of telephone, video conference or other remote electronic means is consistent with rights guaranteed by the Florida Constitution.

“Florida’s Sunshine Laws are among the strongest in the nation and give every citizen access to information necessary for participating in the democratic process,” said Governor Crist. “The Commission on Open Government will help ensure that all levels of government are accessible to the people.”

The commission’s findings and recommendations will be presented to the Governor, the Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives by Dec. 31, 2008.

Carassas said he agrees with Crist on the importance of Florida’s Sunshine Laws, giving every citizen access to information necessary for participating in the democratic process and ensuring that all levels of government are accessible to the people.

Carassas, who currently presides over misdemeanor violation cases at the Criminal Justice Center, took the bench in November 2005 after being appointed by then-Gov. Jeb Bush to a new judgeship created by the 2005 Legislature.

Immediately prior to being appointed to the bench, Judge Carassas, as deputy attorney general for central Florida, oversaw state attorney general offices in Tampa, Orlando, Daytona Beach, St. Petersburg and Bradenton. Prior to joining the attorney general’s staff, Judge Carassas, 41, was elected to two terms in the Florida House of Representatives, representing District 54 in Pinellas County.

In 2002, the First Amendment Foundation cited him as Legislator of the Year. Barbara Petersen of Tallahassee, president of that Foundation, will serve as chair of the Commission on Open Government. Other members are:

Gerald Bailey, Tallahassee, commissioner of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; Bob Butterworth, secretary, Florida Department of Children and Families; Sandy D’Alemberte, president emeritus, Florida State University, and attorney with experience in First Amendment issues and litigation; State Sen. Paula Dockery of Lakeland; Jeanne Grinstead, deputy managing editor, St. Petersburg Times, and president, Florida Society of Newspaper Editors; Hillsborough County Attorney Renee Lee; State Rep. Will Weatherford, of Wesley Chapel.

Carassas said the commission will conduct at least three public hearings prior to finalizing its report.



*Judge Carassas*