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**Public Information Office**

## **Circuit Judge Robert Morris Re-Elected For New Term as Sixth Circuit's Chief Judge**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CLEARWATER** – Circuit Judge Robert J. Morris Jr. has been re-elected for a second two-year term as chief judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit, beginning July 1.

Chief judges are constitutionally responsible for the administrative supervision of the courts and court staff within their circuit, and Judge Morris has guided the local courts through a turbulent two years. His effect on the system actually began before his chief judge tenure. With overcrowding at the Pinellas County Jail at a critical stage, he worked with the sheriff, state attorney and public defender to effect new methods for dealing with offenders with less serious charges and to allow defense attorneys to get matters heard on a timelier basis.



*Judge Morris*

The result has been that population in the jail has been lowered to a point where a proposal to rent space to other agencies is being seriously considered.

About two-thirds of the way through the first year of his initial term, state and county governments began to feel the serious effects of the declining economy, and for more than a year, Judge Morris has guided the local courts through budget and staff cuts, duty re-alignments and increased caseloads, particularly in areas such as real estate foreclosures.

Judge Morris attributes his first term accomplishments to the judges he works with on a daily basis. “Without the support of the 68 judges that I serve, this job – in these difficult times – would be nearly impossible,” he said. “It is a privilege to serve them and the people of the Sixth Judicial Circuit.”

The Sixth Circuit, comprised of courts in Pasco and Pinellas Counties, serves more than 1.5 million residents. Last year, the various courts in the circuit dealt with more than 415,000 new filings. The 69 judges and approximately 250 support staff carry out their duties in nine courthouses in seven locations in the two counties.

Judge Morris has been on the bench since 1997, when he was appointed to a vacant county judgeship by Gov. Lawton Chiles. His tenure on the circuit bench began in 2002 after he was appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush. Because of his expertise in Family Law, then-Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Barbara J. Pariente

appointed him in 2004 to chair the Supreme Court Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court. And in 2006, Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis appointed him to a six-year term on the state's Trial Court Budget Commission.

Before becoming a judge, he was a practicing lawyer for 17 years, earning a Martindale Hubbell rating of AV, the highest rating given by the leading organization that rates lawyers. He is a graduate of Tarpon Springs High School and earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Florida College of Journalism and a juris doctorate from DePaul University College of Law.