




LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL REPORT FORM

Chief Judge of Circuit:	The Honorable Shawn Crane	
Name of Submitter:	Andrew B. Sasso	
Date:	December 15, 2025	

***Reports must be filed by June 15 and December 15 each year.**

SC 2023-0884 - Appendix A

Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals

3.7 Reporting

- a) Each LPP must file a written report with the chief judge of its circuit, the Florida Supreme Court, and The Florida Bar identifying all professionalism referrals received against a member of The Florida Bar in June and December of each calendar year.
- b) The biannual reports must include the following information for each referral for the six (6) calendar months preceding the month in which the report is due:
 1. The date of the referral;
 2. The circuit in which the issue arose;
 3. A short summary detailing the substance of the referral;
 4. The relationship of the respondent voluntarily participated in the process;
 5. Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process;
 6. The resolution, if any, of the referral; and
 7. Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent.
- c) The reports must not include identifying information for the respondent or the party who submitted the referral.

INFORMATION FOR SUBMITTERS

1. **Purpose and Use:** This form collects information about your Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel and its activity for the last six (6) months. This form also asks for updates to the contact information for your Local Professionalism Panel. The information about your Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel will be used to update the Center's Local Professionalism Panel contact list, as well as to gauge how each Circuit is carrying out panel activities.
2. **Reporting Period:** Reports must be filed by June 15th and December 15th and include information for the six (6) calendar months preceding the month in which the report is due.
3. **Where to Submit:** Submit this form and any attachments by email to cfp@floridabar.org or by regular mail to:

The Florida Bar
Henry Latimer Center for Professionalism
651 E. Jefferson Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

4. **Questions:** Direct all questions about this form to cfp@floridabar.org.

June Reports should include information from January 1 to June 15.
December Reports should include information from June 16 to December 15.

LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL QUESTIONS

Please complete the information below regarding any activity within your Local Professionalism Panel. Additional pages may be attached as needed.

- 1. Please describe the process by which complaints are addressed.** You may attach a link to the complaint form or link to where information is located on your website that advises the consumers, attorneys, and judges how to file a complaint.

RE: PROFESSIONALISM COMMITTEE AND LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL -
ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2025-033 PA/PI-CIR-August 1, 2025
<https://www.jud6.org/LegalCommunity/LegalPractice/AOSAndRules/aos/aos2025/2025-033.pdf>

Local Professionalism Panel Complaint Referral
<https://www.floridabar.org/prof/local/lpp-referral-form/>

- 2. Please describe what types of professionalism issues are seen most often in this Circuit?**

The types of professionalism issues seen most often in the Sixth Circuit are decorum and courtesy. Under the **Professionalism Expectations**, expectation 5.1(A lawyer should abstain from rude, disruptive, and disrespectful behavior.) and expectation 7.2 (A lawyer should counsel a client or prospective client, even with respect to a meritorious claim or defense, about the public and private burdens of pursuing the claim as compared with the benefits to be achieved.) are seen most often. We also see attorneys failing to comply with this provision of **The Florida Bar Creed of Professionalism**:

I will strictly adhere to the spirit as well as the letter of my profession's code of ethics, to the extent that the law permits and will at all times be guided by a fundamental sense of honor, integrity, and fair play.

3. What are believed to be the causes of professionalism issues within your Circuit?

Although the causes of professionalism issues are numerous, some of the most common factors include poor communication (such as relying solely on emails instead of in-person conversations or meetings), a lack of mentoring, diminished relationships between lawyers, high rates of mental health challenges (like depression and anxiety), substance abuse (harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and drugs), intense pressure to meet deadlines, prioritizing financial gain over client interests, an adversarial culture that values success at any cost, ethical conflicts arising from client demands for aggressive or even unethical tactics, and insufficient focus on mental health and well-being.

Also contributing to unprofessionalism is the lack of knowledge about the existence of the Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals (*e.g.*, "Unprofessional Conduct" means a violation of the Standards of Professionalism found in the Oath of Admission to The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Creed of Professionalism, the Professionalism Expectations, and the Rules Regulating The Florida Bar), lack of knowledge about the existence the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel, and great hesitation to use the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel due to fear of reprisal.

4. How often does your Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel meet?

Pursuant to RE: PROFESSIONALISM COMMITTEE AND LOCAL PROFESSIONALISM PANEL -ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2025-033 PA/PI-CIR-August I, 2025, the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel will meet from time to time to discuss the types of situations that have arisen and their resolutions, and to discuss possible modifications in procedure or structure of the process. Additionally, the Chair of the LPP, or the member of the LPP designated by the Chair, must attend conferences and trainings organized by The Florida Bar. For example, attached is the Sixth Judicial Circuit Local Professionalism Panel Agenda for the last meeting on Wednesday, August 13, 2025.

5. Please describe any training provided to committee members.

To date, there have been two virtual meetings of the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel on April 1, 2024 and November 6, 2024. The April 1, 2024 meeting included training with Shanell M. Schuyler, Director of ACAP/Intake with The Florida Bar. Members of the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel were also provided with The Florida Bar's Local Professionalism Panel Training (Course: #8354) (<https://www.floridabar.org/prof/local/>).

Further, plans are underway for a virtual meeting with John Lesko who serves as Outreach Coordinator with Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc. to assist members of the Local Professionalism Panel to understand how to identify and seek assistance with substance abuse and mental health issues (such as dementia, stress, anxiety, depression, bi-polar disorder, compulsive disorders, or dual diagnoses). This training will provide LPP members with necessary knowledge for managing challenges that can arise when working through the interactive process with attorneys referred to the LPP.

6. How is your Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel promoted?

Chief Judge Shawn Crane speaks about the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel at local bar association luncheons (*e.g.*, Clearwater Bar Association; St. Pete Bar Association; West Pasco Bar Association). Articles are published in local bar publications. For example, attached is an article published in the St. Petersburg Bar Association's Paraclete entitled "Professionalism Panels Take Center Stage." The Circuit has also posted about the Local Professionalism Panel on its Facebook page.

Additionally, the LPP and professionalism are addressed at special events like at the St. Petersburg Bar Foundation's 11th Annual Professionalism Seminar. Chief Judge Crane also highlighted the Circuit's Local Professionalism Panel at the St Petersburg Bar Association and Clearwater Bar Association 2025 Bench & Bar-B-Que-at Stetson University College of Law. This was a half day program that includes a plenary session with the Chief Judge and President of The Florida Bar Rosalyn Sia Baker-Barnes with the attached flyer provided to all attendees.

Finally, the LPP is constantly brainstorming ways to promote the LPP and professionalism within our Circuit. As shown on the attached "Script for LPP Short Speech," the LPP developed a two-minute presentation about the Local Professionalism Panel that will be provided by members of the LPP at the beginning of meetings of local and voluntary bar associations in the Sixth Judicial Circuit. The LPP garnered the support of all local bar associations so that this script and the attached flyer could be provided at all upcoming meetings to attendees. This script will allow more people to provide information about the LPP and reach a broader audience.

Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form

Date of Referral: May 13, 2025	Circuit in which issue arose: Sixth
Short Summary detailing the substance of the referral	
<p>A Circuit Court Judge entered an Order referring respondent to the Local Professionalism Panel due to her habitual failure to timely submit Orders she had been instructed to prepare and timely submit to the Court. Counsel had previously engaged in a meeting with the same Circuit Court Judge for the same behavior.</p>	
The relationship of the respondent to the person submitting the referral.	
<p>Circuit Court Judge</p>	
Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
<p>Respondent reached out to the member of the Local Professionalism Panel completing this Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form as soon as respondent received the Order referring respondent to the Local Professionalism Panel - respondent was very apologetic.</p>	
The resolution, if any, of the referral;*	
<p>The referring Circuit Court Judge and respondent agreed to have a face to face meeting to discuss the issue.</p>	
Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent	
<p>The member of the Local Professionalism Panel completing this Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form is unaware of any previous referral of respondent to the Local Professionalism Panel - however, the referring Circuit Court Judge indicated prior issues with respondent.</p>	

Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form

Date of Referral: May 22, 2025	Circuit in which issue arose: Sixth
Short Summary detailing the substance of the referral	
Respondent was accused of exhibiting rude, disruptive, and disrespectful behavior towards a bailiff and presiding Judge.	
The relationship of the respondent to the person submitting the referral.	
Respondent is a practicing attorney. The person submitting the referral was the trial judge.	
Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
Yes, Respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
The resolution, if any, of the referral;*	
Respondent acknowledged that he should have handled the situation in a more professional manner. In his defense, he stated that he felt the bailiff was singling him out unnecessarily and without justification. Respondent ultimately acknowledged that he must react in a more professional way.	
Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent	
There were no known previous referrals against Respondent	

Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form

Date of Referral: May 11,2025	Circuit in which issue arose: Sixth
Short Summary detailing the substance of the referral	
Respondent was accused of sending an unprofessional email to one of the constitutional officers harassing the employees.	
The relationship of the respondent to the person submitting the referral.	
The person submitting the referral was a constitutional officer. The respondent was an attorney in communication with the office of the constitutional officer.	
Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
The respondent did not appear to be receptive to the contact. The respondent did not believe his actions were an issue and believed it was justified.	
The resolution, if any, of the referral;*	
Respondent believed the constitutional officer's office is violating the client's rights and the contact is justified. Respondent has continued to email the member of the Local Professionalism Panel completing this Local Professionalism Panel Report Form with examples and concerns to validate the unprofessional contact.	
Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent	
There were previous issues with the respondent including an Admission of Minor Misconduct with The Florida Bar in 2021.	

Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form

Date of Referral: August 15, 2025	Circuit in which issue arose: Sixth
Short Summary detailing the substance of the referral	
A Judge (A) referred the case after the respondent failed to appear for a hearing and then moved to abate the civil case due to medical issues.	
The relationship of the respondent to the person submitting the referral.	
Judge overseeing the civil case - respondent is attorney of record in the case.	
Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
Respondent was not contacted by the member of the Local Professionalism Panel completing this Local Professionalism Panel Report Form.	
The resolution, if any, of the referral;*	
The member of the Local Professionalism Panel completing this Local Professionalism Panel Report Form reached out to the Judge (B) who previously referred the respondent to the Local Professionalism Panel and confirmed that Judge (B) filed a complaint with The Florida Bar, via Court Counsel. It appears matter is more properly under the purview of The Florida Bar.	
Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent	
Yes, there was a prior referral within the last 5 months from another Judge (B) in the Circuit.	

Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form

Date of Referral: 10/21/25	Circuit in which issue arose: 6th
Short Summary detailing the substance of the referral	
<p>The referral was based on concerns about the respondent did not appearing at scheduled hearings. No communication with the Judge and/or the Judicial Assistant after attempt to make contact.</p>	
The relationship of the respondent to the person submitting the referral.	
<p>The respondent was appearing before the Judge in a pretrial setting for a criminal case.</p>	
Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
<p>The respondent was very appreciative of the call and the discussion that followed. The member of the Local Professionalism Panel completing this Local Professionalism Panel Report Form practices in the same area of law as the respondent and advised the respondent of ways to try and mitigate issues in the future.</p>	
The resolution, if any, of the referral;*	
<p>The respondent was going to call and speak with the Judge that they believed may have had an issue with respondent's conduct. The particular Judge had called and left a message for the respondent the day prior looking for clarity as to why the respondent had not appeared in court.</p>	
Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent	
<p>No known previous referrals for respondent to the Local Professionalism Panel.</p>	

Local Professionalism Panel Referral Form

Date of Referral: 10/24/2025	Circuit in which issue arose: Sixth
Short Summary detailing the substance of the referral	
Respondent was requested by Judge to remove pictures from respondent's social media profile that had been taken in the courtroom. In response, the respondent made unprofessional written statements to the Judge.	
The relationship of the respondent to the person submitting the referral.	
The referral was submitted by the Judge overseeing a case respondent had just completed.	
Whether or not the respondent voluntarily participated in the process.	
Yes.	
The resolution, if any, of the referral;*	
The respondent indicated that there was "more to the story" given a verbal conversation that preceded the emails, however, respondent recognized that "no one has gotten in trouble over something they did not say" and agreed to refrain from similar behavior in the future. Respondent prides himself on his professionalism and distinguished career and indicated he would comply with all similar orders going forward.	
Whether there were previous referrals against the respondent	
No known prior referral to the Local Professionalism Panel.	

8. **Please provide the contact information for all current panel members.** Please include: name(s), email(s), address(es), and phone number(s), and title if applicable.

Name	Title/Firm	Email	Address	Phone Number
	SEE ATTACHED			

The Florida Bar will publish on its website the LPP biannual reports. The Chief Judge, or the Chief Judge's designee, will publish on the judicial Circuit's website the LPP biannual reports from that Circuit.

Attachment A

Sixth Judicial Circuit Local Professionalism Panel Membership Roster

Chair of the LPP: Andrew Sasso

<u>Circuit Wide Contact Attorney</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>
Andrew Sasso	Office: 727-441-8966

Pasco County

<u>Name</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Ryan Doddridge	Office: 727-846-8500	Probate/Civil	June 30, 2027
Francis Werner-Watkins	Office: 727-863-1553	Criminal	June 30, 2027
Amanda Colon	Office: 813-254-8998	Family	June 30, 2026*
L. Javan Grant	Office: 813-995-6444	Personal Injury	June 30, 2028**
James Stearns	Office: 727-846-8500	Probate/Civil	June 30, 2028

Pinellas County

<u>Name</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>	<u>Practice Area</u>	<u>Term Expiration</u>
Andrew Sasso	Office: 727-441-8966	Probate	June 30, 2027
Bridget Heptner	Office: 727-726-9799	Family	June 30, 2027
Denis DeVlaming	Office: 727-461-0525	Criminal	June 30, 2026*
Joshua Chilson	Office: 727-461-1818	Personal Injury	June 30, 2026*
Raleigh "Lee" Greene	Office: 727-821-2900	Family	June 30, 2026*
Shirin Vesely	Office: 727-896-7171	Civil	June 30, 2028**
Zack Zuroweste	Office: 727-796-7666	Probate/Civil	June 30, 2028**
Weston "Wes" Smith	Office: 727-408-6100	Personal Injury	June 30, 2028**
William Douglas Baird		Retired Judge	June 30, 2028

To stagger the terms of LPP members, members designated with an * will initially serve a shorter term. Thereafter, members of the LPP serve staggered three-year terms, beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30 of the third year. LPP members may be reappointed to serve one additional three-year term. Under no circumstances may a member serve for more than six consecutive years. Members designated with ** are serving their second term.

Updated contact information can be found on The Florida Bar's Lawyer Directory.

Last Updated 7/9/25

Professionalism Panels Take Center Stage

By Daniel Smith



For many years, local professionalism panels (LPPs) have served as a valuable tool for addressing and resolving professionalism issues in Florida. These panels, which are independent of The Florida Bar, provide for peer-to-peer mentoring at a local level with the goal of bringing to light and correcting attorney conduct that is unprofessional, but that may not warrant a referral to The Florida Bar for a disciplinary investigation.

"When unprofessional conduct goes unreported, the unprofessional lawyers continue their behavior, which often worsens," said Judge Kimberly Byrd, who is the Executive Chair of the Professionalism Committee for the Sixth Judicial Circuit. "If we can address unprofessional behavior through the less formal LPP process, we hope that the behavior can be curbed before it becomes a bar grievance issue."

It's clear that LPPs will continue to be a centerpiece in the effort to combat unprofessional conduct for the foreseeable future. In July 2023, the Florida Supreme Court adopted a new professionalism code, called the Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals, which reaffirmed the importance of LPPs and clarified their role in curbing attorney misconduct.¹ Significantly, the Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals distinguishes the informal LPP process from the formal disciplinary process, providing that "[m]inor or isolated instances of unprofessional conduct may be addressed through the informal" LPP process but that "substantial or repeated" violations are appropriate for referral to The Florida

Bar.² Further, the new code outlines procedures for the formation of each of these panels at the local level, and sets meeting and reporting requirements. The effect of these measures may create more uniformity amongst LPPs throughout the different judicial circuits and allow for improvements and enhancements to be made to the program in the future.

Following the lead of the Supreme Court, in February 2024 the Sixth Judicial Circuit issued Administrative Order 2024-010, which reaffirmed the Circuit's commitment to a Professionalism Committee, and described the enhanced role of LPPs in light of the new professionalism code. Subsequently, in

August 2025, the Sixth Judicial Circuit issued Administrative Order 2025-033 to further refine the process. The LPP consists of at least twelve members, one who functions as the Chair of the LPP and "Contact Attorney" and others serve as "Intermediaries." Membership is representative of the entire Circuit with members from both Pasco and Pinellas County and a variety of practice areas represented. Professionalism referrals may be initiated directly through the LPP or through the Attorney Consumer Assistance and Intake Program (ACAP) of The Florida Bar. The LPP does not have the authority to discipline a "Referred Party" or require that the Referred Party appear before the LPP. However, it may counsel or recommend an appropriate

Sixth Judicial Circuit Local Professionalism Panel Membership Roster

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program to the Referred Party if it deems necessary (see page 50 for additional details).

Andrew Sasso is the Chair of the LPP for the Sixth Judicial Circuit. One of the primary goals of the LPP in the Sixth Judicial Circuit, he said, is to create an informal and confidential means to resolve professionalism issues. In this way, it is quite different than the formal grievance process. Mentorship is an important component of the LPP process, and Sasso said that, in most instances, attorneys who are the subject of a referral are appreciative of the feedback they receive and the fact that the underlying issue could be resolved informally.

Judge Byrd noted that, sometimes, attorneys are reluctant to file formal bar complaints against their fellow attorneys, perhaps because they don't want to cause damage to another person's career, or because they fear retribution. "Our hope is that the LPP will give those reluctant lawyers and judges a mechanism to address their grievance."

Of course, it may not always be possible for the identity of a person making a referral to the LPP to remain anonymous. For example, if a lawyer reports the unprofessional conduct of another lawyer that occurred during a deposition, it will probably be obvious who made the referral. Nevertheless, Sasso stressed that confidentiality was an important part of the LPP program.

Issues appropriate for LPP review may include interrupting opposing counsel or a judge, tardiness, lack of preparation, failing to respond to communications, inappropriate behavior at depositions or in response to an adverse ruling, or inappropriate attire at depositions or court proceedings. Importantly, the Supreme Court's July 2023 order amended the Professionalism Expectations to clarify that professionalism standards in Florida apply to all forms of communication, including remote communications.³ "If someone who refers conduct to the LPP is unsure whether it is an LPP issue or a Bar issue, the referring attorney or judge may send the matter [to] the LPP," said Judge Byrd. "The LPP may refer matters to the Bar when appropriate."

Sasso said the best way to initiate a referral with the LPP is to simply contact him at abs@macfar.com or 727-441-8966.

Dan Smith is a St. Petersburg-based attorney who practices VA benefits law. He is a May 2008 graduate of Stetson University College of Law.

1. *In re Code for Resolving Professionalism Referrals & Amendments to Rule Regulating the Fla. Bar* 6-10, 367 So. 3d 1184, 1185 (Fla. 2023).
2. *Id.* at 1187.
3. *Id.* at 1185. The amended Professionalism Expectations are attached as Appendix B to the Supreme Court's order. *Id.* at 1190-1205.

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PROFESSIONALISM CHALLENGES?

Contact the Local Professionalism Panel (LPP)

professional
part in an activity, such as spo
displaying a high level of com
3 undertaken or performed b

PRIORITY

To address, in a confidential manner, unprofessional attorney conduct that has not risen to the level of necessitating a formal complaint with The Florida Bar.

PANEL

12 members ("Intermediaries" including a "Contact Attorney") appointed by the Sixth Circuit Chief Judge.

PRIVATE

All referrals and communications within the LPP are confidential.

PROCESS

- ✓ Bar members (Referring Party) may initiate an unprofessional conduct referral related to a member (Referred Party) of The Florida Bar by contacting the Contact Attorney.
- ✓ The Contact Attorney will contact an Intermediary and describe the referral.
- ✓ The Intermediary may contact the Referred Party to discuss a resolution, contact another Intermediary, decide there is no unprofessional conduct or insufficient information, or refer the matter to The Florida Bar.
- ✓ When the matter has been resolved, the Intermediary will contact the Referring Party to share the resolution.

PROFESSIONALISM REFERRALS

Contact Andy Sasso
MacFarlane, Ferguson, McMullen

abs@macfar.com
727.444.1409

See Administrative
Order 2025-033

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

IN RE: Code For Resolving
Professionalism Referrals
No. SC2023-0884

PANEL

Chair of LLP: Andrew Sasso

Circuit Wide Contact Attorney, 727-441-8966

PASCO COUNTY

NAME	CONTACT INFORMATION	PRACTICE AREA	TERM EXPIRATION
Ryan Doddridge	Office: 727-846-8500	Probate/Civil	June 30, 2027
Francis Werner-Watkins	Office: 727-863-1553	Criminal	June 30, 2027
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PINELLAS COUNTY

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GLOSSARY

- ✓ Referring Party - Party initiating the referral to the Local Professionalism Panel (LPP)
- ✓ Contact Attorney - Person who accepts the referral from the Referring Party.
- ✓ Intermediary - Member of the LPP who the Contact Attorney calls to handle the referral.
- ✓ Referred Party - The attorney whose conduct is the subject of the referral.

PROFESSIONALISM REFERRALS

Contact Andy Sasso
MacFarlane, Ferguson, McMullen

abs@macfar.com
727.444.1409

See Administrative
Order 2025-033

Chambers of

Kimberly Byrd, Circuit Judge

SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
WEST PASCO JUDICIAL CENTER
7530 Little Road
New Port Richey, FL 34654

TO: Members of the LPP

FROM: Kimberly Byrd, Circuit Judge

RE: Script for LPP Short Speech

I am here on behalf of the Local Professionalism Panel, also known as the LPP, which was created by an Order of the Supreme Court of Florida and a Sixth Judicial Circuit Administrative Order. The LPP is made up of lawyers and judges from a variety of backgrounds and locations. The Purpose of the LPP is to address professionalism issues with lawyers before the issues end up escalating to a Bar grievance. The LPP process is anonymous and confidential. You can report a professionalism issue to the chair of the LPP, Andy Sasso, and he will contact one of our LPP panel members to address the issue. That LPP panel member will reach out to the referred attorney and attempt to counsel them about professionalism. The panel member will not disclose who made the report. We could probably all think of one lawyer who might benefit from a phone call from an LPP member concerning their behavior. Our goal is to provide a means to curb the behavior so it doesn't go unchecked or end up as a Bar grievance. We hope that you will keep the LPP in mind when you are dealing with unprofessional lawyers. Again, you can call or email Andy Sasso if you have an issue.