

Screening Conference Member Biographies

The Screening Conference in the Northern District

Thomas J. Brown

Thomas J. Brown earned his Bachelor of Science with Honors in Political Science with a minor in Accounting from Florida A&M University in 1977. He earned his J.D. with Honors from Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in 1983. Thomas and his brother, Hubert R. Brown, opened Brown and Brown Attorneys at Law, P.A. in 1994, which has continued for over 27 years. Thomas has practiced law for over thirty-one years in the areas of Taxation, corporate, construction and civil litigation in the subareas of wrongful death, personal injury, premise liability, residential facility abuse and neglect, trucking crashes and medical malpractice. He has also served as a Leon County Administrative Appeals Hearing Officer and he served as Outside General Counsel for corporations, construction companies and currently serve as the Outside General Counsel for the Eleventh Episcopal District of the African Methodist Church, Inc. Thomas is most honored to have assisted the General Counsel of Florida A&M University with the reinstatement of the School of Law at Florida A&M University with a presentation before the Former State of Florida Board of Regents for its Universities.

Bill Cervone

Bill Cervone retired last year as State Attorney of Florida's 8th Judicial Circuit. Before serving as elected State Attorney since 2000, his previous career spanned private practice in insurance law and medical malpractice, and he also worked as an Assistant State Attorney in the Gainesville-headquartered prosecutor's office for 20 years. While in elected office, he served for two years as President of the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association, and as Florida's representative on the National District Attorneys Association Board of Directors. He is a graduate of the University of Florida Law School, where he also later served as an adjunct professor for over 20 years, and he has been involved in numerous local and state programs related to criminal justice issues.

Judge Nikki Ann Clark (ret.)

Judge Nikki Clark (ret.) served as a judge on the First District Court of Appeal until her retirement in 2015. She was the first Black woman to sit on the First District Court of Appeal, to which she was appointed in 2009. Clark was also the first African American circuit judge and the first woman circuit judge to serve on the Second Judicial Circuit bench where she served from 1993 to 2009. Prior to becoming a judge, Clark was an attorney with Legal Services of North Florida and held several state government positions, including assistant Florida attorney general, legislation and policy development director for the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation, and chief cabinet aide for the Office of the Florida Governor. She currently serves as an adjunct professor at the Florida State University College of Law.

Opal McKinney-Williams

Opal McKinney-Williams has over 17 years of experience representing local governments and educational entities in the areas of administrative and regulatory law and compliance. She is currently a Senior Attorney at Pittman Law Group (PLG). She previously worked closely with education-focused governmental entities. She received her B.S. in Criminal Justice, magna cum laude, from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1998 and her J.D. from Florida State University in 2002. She is admitted to practice in the state of Florida, and is Board Certified in Education Law.

John Laurance Reid

John Laurance Reid is the founder of the Law Office of John Reid PLL, specializing in government and administrative law, family law, civil litigation, state appeals, and governmental relations. He currently serves as the Board Counsel to the Tallahassee Independent Ethics Board and as the Town Attorney to the Town of Greenville in Madison County. Reid is a founding member of the North Florida Chapter of the American Constitution Society. He graduated from the University of Miami School of Law in 1999. He is admitted to the Florida and District of Columbia Bar Associations, the United States Supreme Court, and the U.S. District Courts for the Northern, Middle, and Southern Districts of Florida.

Mark Schlakman

Mark R. Schlakman is the senior program director for the Florida State University Center for the Advancement of Human Rights. He has held several senior positions at the state and federal levels, including assistant general counsel and special counsel to Governor Lawton Chiles; special advisor to Governor Jeb Bush; senior advisor to Governor "Buddy" MacKay; foreign affairs officer within the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the US Department of State. He was appointed to the Florida Fusion Center's Constitutional Protections and Privacy Advisory Board and the Florida Division of Emergency Management Advisory Group. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Miami and his J.D. from the Georgetown University Law Center.

The Screening Conference in the Middle District of Florida

Ryan Barack

Ryan Barack is a leading civil rights and employment lawyer in Clearwater, Florida. He is a former chair of the Federal Courts Practice Committee of the Florida Bar. He has served as counsel to the Democratic Party in various election-related disputes in the Tampa Bay area. He is an active member of the Tampa Bay ACS Lawyers Chapter. Mr. Barack earned his JD from the Marshall-Wythe School of Law at the College of William and Mary.

David M. Chico

David Chico is founder and managing partner of David Chico Law Group, which focuses on civil litigation, including contract, real estate, business and shareholder disputes. Prior to founding his own practice Mr. Chico worked as a prosecutor for the Ninth Judicial Circuit for Orange and Osceola Counties and as a clinical social worker for the San Diego Department of Health. He served in the U.S. Navy for 10 years. Mr. Chico, who earned his law degree from the University of Florida, is admitted to the bar for the Florida Supreme Court, the Middle District of Florida Federal Court, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Eleventh Circuit.

Eduardo Fernandez

Eduardo Fernández is an attorney who serves as outside counsel to entrepreneurs, businesses, and nonprofits. Formerly a Florida Constitutional Officer, Mr. Fernández is also the Chairman of the Orange County Planning & Zoning Commission, an on-air analyst on English and Spanish language television, a Director of the State of Florida's Florida Opportunity Fund and a published author. Mr. Fernandez was recently named as one of Central Florida's "40 under 40" by the Orlando Business Journal, as one of Central Florida's "25 Most Influential Hispanics" by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Orlando. Fernandez earned his J.D. from the University of Florida College of Law.

Joseline Jean-Louis Hardrick

Professor Joseline Hardrick joined WMU-Cooley Law School in July 2019. She most recently served as a federal judicial law clerk for the U.S. District Court, Middle District of Florida, after working as a litigation associate with Bush Ross, P.A. Professor Hardrick is the founder and director of nonprofit Diversity Access Pipeline, Inc. (DAP), for which she recently received the Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division 2019 Diversity Award. Professor Hardrick earned her J.D. from the Florida State University School of Law.

Judge Belvin Perry, Jr.

Judge Belvin Perry is an attorney with the Law Firm of Morgan and Morgan. The first African-American to be elected to the circuit bench of the Ninth Circuit, Mr. Perry has presided over many high-profile trials in his 25 years of service. His recent accolades include the NAACP Community Service Man of the Year Award, the Community Legal Service of Mid-Florida Legacy of Justice Award, and the Black History Committee of Orange County, Inc., Distinguished Service Award. He is married to his wife, LaDrean, and they have two adult children and two grandsons. Mr. Perry earned his J.D. from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law.

Wade Rolle

Attorney Wade M. Rolle is the founder of Wade Rolle & Associates, which specializes in criminal litigation, personal injury, and general civil practices in both Georgia and Florida. He began his career as an Assistant State Attorney in the felony division, focusing on gang-related law enforcement. Former President of the D.W. Perkin Bar Association, Attorney Rolle presided over public hearings on allegations of voter fraud and disenfranchisement during the 2004 Presidential elections. Attorney Rolle earned his J.D. from the University of Georgia School of Law.

Carol Saviak

Carol Saviak serves as strategic partnerships manager for the Northeast Florida Regional Airport (NFRA) in St. Augustine, with more than 25 years of experience in professional advocacy, non-profit and volunteer management experience. Previously, Ms. Saviak served as executive director of non-profit organization St. Johns Volunteers!, Inc. and Coalition for Property Rights, and government relations and special projects manager for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Her background in political communications includes political polling and campaign management. She and her husband, Dr. Joe Saviak, who is also a public policy expert and consultant, live in St. Augustine. Carol is a graduate of the University of Florida.

Patricia R. Sigman

Patricia R. Sigman is certified as a Labor & Employment Lawyer and Mediator in Florida. She has practiced employment law in Seminole County for 28 years, representing primarily employees. Ms. Sigman serves the legal community as a member of the Florida Bar's Labor & Employment Law Certification Committee. In 1993, she started her law firm, Sigman & Sigman, P.A., which received a "Best Law Firms" in Florida First Tier Ranking in U.S. News and World Report between 2016-2020. She earned her JD from Stetson University College of Law.

The Screening Conference in the Southern District of Florida

Vivian de las Cuevas-Diaz

Vivian de las Cuevas-Diaz is an attorney in Holland & Knight's Miami office and serves as the firmwide deputy section leader of the Real Estate Section. Ms. de las Cuevas-Diaz's practice is supplemented by her bilingual and multicultural team that facilitates her U.S.-based and international clients' needs in their U.S.-bound projects. She assists clients in real estate transactions, joint ventures, real estate finance, and workouts. Ms. de las Cuevas-Diaz received her J.D. from Tulane University Law School and is admitted to the Florida Bar. She previously sat on the Florida Federal Judicial Nominating Commission - Southern District Leadership, Class XXXIV.

Larry Handfield

Larry R. Handfield, Esq. is a native of Miami, Florida and represents client through The Handfield Firm, which he established in 1988. He received his B.S. from Bethune Cookman University in 1978 and his J.D. from Howard University. Mr. Handfield served as a prosecutor in Miami Dade County from 1981-1984 under Janet Reno, former United States Attorney General, and has been in private practice since then. He has served in multiple public roles, including the Florida Ethics Commission, Sentencing Guideline Commission, and the Florida Judicial Nomination Commission.

Judge Ilona Holmes (ret.)

Judge Ilona Holmes (ret.) served as a Broward County Circuit Court Judge for just under 24 years, from 1995 to 2018. She received her bachelor's degree from Florida Atlantic University and her J.D. from Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law. Before becoming a Judge, Ms. Holmes served as an Assistant State Attorney in Dade County and later an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Fort Lauderdale. She also teaches judges all over the world about ethics, judicial discretion, and other related topics through the Reno, Nevada-based National Judicial College.

Eduardo Lacasa

Eduardo Lacasa serves as the Chief Administrative Officer and General Counsel for the Chrysalis Center, Inc. and General Counsel for Court Options, Inc. The Chrysalis Center is a community mental health center serving South Florida Counties. Court Options is a provider of probation, pre-trial diversion, and other criminal justice programs for Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Broward Counties. He has been involved in numerous public boards and commissions, including the Florida Boxing Commission, where he served as Chairman under Gov. Bush and was re-appointed by Gov. Crist. He is currently serving a fourth term as a member of the Federal Judicial Nominating Committee Florida Southern District.

Victoria Mesa-Estrada

Victoria Mesa-Estrada is a civil rights attorney with the Immigrant Justice Project at Southern Poverty Law Center. She has successfully handed major class actions on behalf of over 1,000 migrant and domestic workers for violations of federal and state employment laws. A native of Colombia, Ms. Mesa-Estrada immigrated to the US in 1992. She graduated from St. Thomas University School of Law in 2008 and holds a Master of Laws in Intercultural Human Rights, cum laude. Ms. Mesa-Estrada is admitted to practice law in the state of Florida, the Federal Southern, Northern, and Middle Districts of Florida, and is the current President of the Palm Beach County Hispanic Bar Association.

Burnadette Norris-Weeks

Burnadette Norris-Weeks is a partner at Austin Pamies Norris Weeks Powell, PLLC. She serves as counsel to various corporations and governmental entities. She previously served as legal counsel to the Broward County Supervisor of Elections Office. She is a two-term member of the Broward County

Charter Review Commission, where she served as the Chair of the Public Safety and Affordable Housing Committee. Ms. Norris-Weeks is the past Chair of the 17th Judicial Circuit's Florida Bar Leadership Committee, former National Chair of the American Bar Association's Litigation Section's Minority Trial Lawyer Committee, and former Chair of the ABA's Young Lawyer Section. She is admitted to practice law before the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. District Courts for the Northern, Middle, and Southern Districts of Florida.

Justice Barbara J. Pariente (ret.)

Justice Barbara J. Pariente has been a justice since 1997 and served as Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court from 2004 through 2006. She attended George Washington University Law School in 1973. In 1973, she began a judicial clerkship with U.S. District Court Judge Norman C. Roettger, Jr., of the Southern District of Florida. In 1983, she formed the law firm of Pariente & Silber, P.A. In both firms, she specialized in civil trial litigation. Since 2010, she has served as the Chief-Justice's designee to the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet. Justice Pariente co-chairs the National Association of Women Judges' Judicial Independence Committee.