



Supreme Court of Florida

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Florida Supreme Court to begin Facebook Live broadcasts

TALLAHASSEE – More than 40 years ago the Florida Supreme Court issued a wide welcome to cameras in its courtroom. That welcome grows even broader this coming Thursday when [Facebook Live](#) broadcasts begin, making this one of the first courts in the world to use social media for official live video.

Thursday's 3:30 p.m. event will showcase the annual Florida Bar Pro Bono Awards honoring lawyers who donate services to people in need. But afterward Facebook Live will be used permanently for all oral arguments, starting with February's, in addition to the live and archived video already available on the Court's 20-year-old video website portal called [Gavel to Gavel](#).

"In the 1970s, Florida became the first state to allow broadcasts of its court cases at a time when every other court in the nation refused it," said [Chief Justice Jorge Labarga](#). "This Court's experiment with transparency showed everyone a better way to balance First Amendment rights against the rights of people involved in a trial or appeal. Social media will be our next step in moving this highly successful model of openness into the Twenty-First Century."

Over time court staff believes that Facebook Live – with access to the world's 2 billion Facebook users – will eclipse the reach of other broadcast methods now being used. More than two-thirds of American adults use Facebook, according to [research](#) by the Pew Research Center. People can watch the live Supreme Court video simply by visiting or following the Court's [Facebook page](#) – and can even continue watching it as they scroll through other newsfeed items.

The Florida Supreme Court first let cameras owned by TV news stations into its courtroom regularly starting in 1975. It began producing live gavel-to-gavel coverage using its own permanent cameras in 1997 in partnership with Florida State University – and made the feed available for free by the Internet, via satellite downlink, and over the statewide cable network [The Florida Channel](#).

This system aired worldwide when the presidential election dispute of 2000, known today as [Bush v. Gore](#), came [before](#) the Florida Supreme Court twice. A mesmerized planet watched lawyers argue from start to finish about how to determine who would become the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush or Al Gore. HBO even made a 2008 movie about these cases called "[Recount](#)," which was filmed on location in Tallahassee and was co-produced by famed director [Sydney Pollack](#).

More recently, the groundwork for Thursday’s Facebook Live video was laid when Labarga and his fellow justices unanimously approved a sweeping court [communication plan](#) in December 2015. It called on Florida’s courts to embrace recent advances in technology and communications, such as social media and podcasting.

The plan also emphasizes the importance of time-proven principles of effective communication. These include building and maintaining relationships of trust with the press and the public. But its key point is to maintain transparency as technology evolves.

In keeping with the plan, the Florida Supreme Court launched its official [Facebook page](#) in the fall of 2016, although it already had been using [Twitter since 2009](#). The inaugural episode of the Court’s podcast series “[Beyond the Bench](#)” aired in late 2017 – a dialogue between Labarga and one of the key drafters of the plan, Leon County Judge [Nina Ashenafi-Richardson](#). The Court then performed a limited but successful test of Facebook Live last December with its partner WFSU/The Florida Channel.

The communication plan, called “Delivering Our Message,” was approved and forwarded to the Florida Supreme Court in 2015 by the Judicial Management Council, a court advisory body that includes judges, lawyers and non-lawyers.

The JMC has been a driving force behind Florida’s uniquely broad policy of openness for more than two decades now, including support for the most extensive network of court communications professionals of any state in the nation. Florida now has public information officers or PIOs at all 26 levels of the state courts system as well as at the judiciary’s central statewide administrative office in Tallahassee. Their statewide professional association, [FCPIO](#), first met in 2005 and is currently the only such state association in the nation. Its president is Michelle Kennedy of the [Eighteenth Circuit Court](#) based in Viera, Florida.

For more information:

Florida Supreme Court Facebook Page (including broadcasts):
<https://www.facebook.com/floridasupremecourt/>

Florida Supreme Court Live & Archived Oral Argument Videos:
<http://wfsu.org/gavel2gavel/>

Florida Supreme Court Podcasts:
http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/pub_info/podcasts.shtml

Florida Court Communications Plan:
http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/pub_info/documents/2016-Judicial-Branch-Court-Communication-Plan.pdf

Social Media in Florida’s courts:
<http://www.flcourts.org/resources-and-services/education-outreach/social-media.stml>

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