

# COURT JURISDICTIONAL LIMITS

## PROPOSED 2019 LEGISLATION

### SENATE BILL 328 (BY SEN. BRANDES)/HOUSE BILL 337 (BY REP. LEEK)

Proposed legislation in the Florida Legislature would raise the jurisdictional limit for County Courts from \$15,000 to \$30,000 and then to \$50,000 in 2022. Currently, any cases with disputes involving more than \$15,000 are heard in Circuit Courts, making them the highest trial courts in Florida's judicial system.

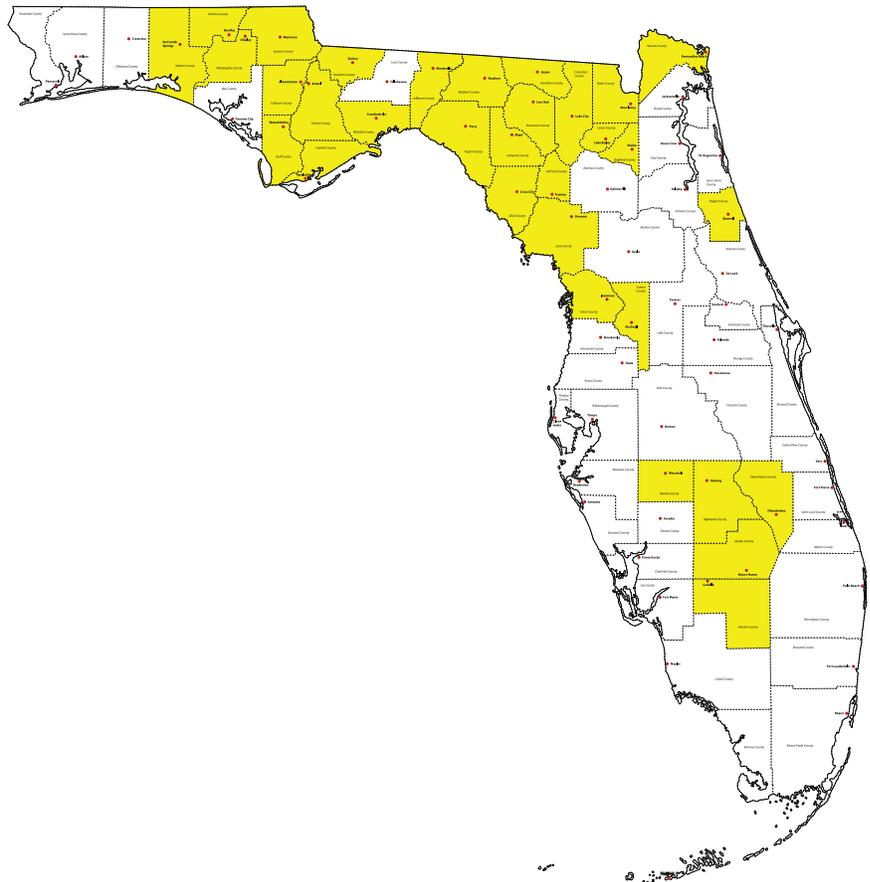
The increased backlog that would result from doubling the jurisdictional limit would render harm to Floridians who would have to face extreme delays before having their cases heard. **In fact, 31 of Florida's 67 counties have just one county court judge**, and that judge's time is split hearing criminal, traffic and civil matters. Disputes for more than \$15,000 often involve issues of greater complexity, which would require an even greater amount of resources, placing that much more strain on the county court system.

According to the Florida Supreme Court Work Group Report, most cases involving property damage insurance claims have a jury trial demand. Increased jury trials will cause county court workload and facility impacts that cannot be met with existing resources. Further, increasing county court jurisdictional amounts is fully anticipated to cause a far greater amount of jury trial demands to arise in county court, as many cases involving property damage insurance claims will likely fall within the increase.

Although the Chief Circuit Court Judge could, "in theory," reassign caseloads in the event of a massive backlog, it is not practical and could also lead to both arbitrary assignment of cases, as well as "venue shopping" for a more favorable outcome.

Circuit courts judges cover for county judges only in the event of an extreme emergency. This is very uncommon, as dockets and jury trials are planned months in advance, so it would take great effort to facilitate a change in venue or judge assignment.

#### Counties With Just One County Judge. Florida's Panhandle Would be Adversely Affected by This Change.



The Courts Jurisdictional Limits bill would cause a backlog crisis in Florida's county court system, harming the quality of justice for hardworking Florida taxpayers and subjecting them to extreme delays.