

Judge Lourdes Casanova: Resilience, Representation, and Upholding Trust in “The People’s Court”

Resilience and gratitude are the twin pillars of Judge Lourdes Casanova’s journey to the bench, shaping not only how she arrived there, but how she serves from it.

From a young age, Judge Casanova knew what she wanted. Go to college. Be a lawyer. Meet the Backstreet Boys. She wrote these three goals on a piece of paper and placed them inside a time capsule while she was in middle school. Having met the Backstreet Boys at one of their shows in 2022, Judge Casanova’s list was complete.

Judge Casanova’s understanding of and passion for the law began at her family’s kitchen table, where her parents recounted life in Cuba and shared stories of labor camps, beatings by soldiers, and their family’s property being seized by the military. One account, which left an indelible mark on Judge Casanova, was the execution of a family member, without a trial.

Her family’s story, rooted in sacrifice and survival, instilled in Judge Casanova a deep appreciation for constitutional principles such as due process, separation of powers, and access to justice, which led her to become a lawyer.

After graduating as valedictorian of Royal Palm Beach High School in 2005 and earning her law degree from the University of Florida in 2012, Judge Casanova began her legal career in public service as an Assistant State Attorney with the Palm Beach County State Attorney’s Office.

In 2015, she entered private practice, where she litigated criminal, civil, and traffic matters. After about five years in private practice, Judge Casanova wanted to become more involved in preserving the rule of law to ensure that justice was not arbitrary but was fair and impartial. So, she set another goal—to become a judge.

The road was not easy. Judge Casanova applied—and was nominated—five times for judicial appointment. Each time, she would gather information, prepare the lengthy application, and endure the rigorous interview process. Along the way, she had moments of self-doubt, but she kept going. The appointment process tested her grit and prepared her for what would come next.

With the encouragement and support of her family and friends, Judge Casanova decided to take the campaign route and sought election to the County Court seat that became vacant after the retirement of Judge Ted Booras.

In November 2024, Palm Beach County voters elected Judge Casanova to the County Court bench, making her the first female Latina elected as a judge in the

county. She began her six-year term on January 7, 2025. In her role, she presides over misdemeanor criminal cases, traffic offenses, and Drug Court—in what she proudly calls “The People’s Court.”

Now, Judge Casanova looks back at her journey and the task ahead of her with gratitude. She is thankful for her family and how their story has shaped the person she is today. She is thankful that she gets to give back to the community in which she was raised. And she is thankful for the opportunity to positively influence how litigants view and interact with the judicial system and the judiciary—especially those litigants who appear without counsel.

“My favorite part of the job is interacting with *pro se* litigants,” she says, beaming from ear to ear. But why?

Judge Casanova recognizes that for many individuals appearing in her courtroom without counsel, the encounter is their first—and sometimes only—interaction with the judicial system. *Pro se* litigants often arrive nervous, confused, and intimidated by unfamiliar procedures. She views those moments as critical opportunities to put their minds at ease and to make clear that they will be treated fairly and with respect regardless of the outcome of their case—ensuring that access to justice is not merely theoretical, but tangible.

“First impressions matter,” she emphasizes.

From Judge Casanova’s office window at the Criminal Justice Complex (commonly known as “Gun Club”), the barbed wire of the County Jail is visible—a stark reminder of the gravity of the justice system and the lives affected by it. Yet anyone who meets her there encounters a striking contrast: a judge who is approachable, who greets each day with a smile, and who is visibly grateful for the opportunity to serve.

It is that same gratitude—rooted in her family’s history, her own perseverance, and her respect for the rule of law—that Judge Lourdes Casanova brings to the bench every day, making an impact on the lives of those who appear before her.

This Judicial Profile is submitted on behalf of the Judicial Relations Committee of the Palm Beach County Bar Association by Toni-Ann S. Brown, an Assistant County Attorney in the Palm Beach County Attorney’s Office. Toni-Ann litigates personal injury, employment, and other civil matters and can be reached at tbrown@pbc.gov.