



Dear Parents and Students:

Have you heard about the 2026 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest? The contest is an annual essay and video competition open to high school students who reside within the [Ninth Circuit's jurisdiction](#). The 2026 contest theme is **"Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness – Your Voice. Your Story. Your America."** District courts within each state and territory will select local contest winners who will then be entered in the Circuit-wide contest.

In the Western District of Washington, the top three essay and video winners will receive cash prizes of \$1,000 for first place, \$750 for second place, and \$500 for third place. These winners will advance to the Ninth Circuit level, where additional cash prizes totaling \$11,400 are awarded, including \$3,000 for first place, \$1,700 for second place, and \$1,000 for third place. In the event of a tie, the U.S. District Court will award up to two duplicate prizes in the top three placement categories. The Court will also select ten Honorable Mention recipients, five essays and five videos. Each Honorable Mention winner will receive \$200. If a video Honorable Mention is awarded to a team of two or three students, the \$200 prize will be divided equally among team members.

Here is a [link](#) to a recording of the first-place Circuit-level winners participating in a panel discussion at the 2025 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest Program and Reception, held during the 2025 Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference in California.

Essay and video entries can be submitted online on the civics contest website, <https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest/>, starting January 7, 2026. The contest submission deadline is Friday, March 6, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time. Contest rules and resource materials will also be available on the website.

For questions regarding the Western District of Washington contest, please contact Chief Deputy Clerk Eric Smits, U.S. District Court, at (206) 370-8434 or Eric_Smits@wawd.uscourts.gov, or Executive Director Tracy M. Morris, Federal Civil Rights Legal Clinic, at (206) 992-7594 or tracymmorris@comcast.net.

For questions about the Circuit-wide contest, please contact Katherine Rodriguez at civicscontest@ce9.uscourts.gov.

Sincerely,
Chief Deputy Clerk Eric Smits
Executive Director Tracy M. Morris