

# 2026 NINTH CIRCUIT CIVICS CONTEST



250th Anniversary  
of the signing of the Declaration of Independence

## Cash Prizes\*

- 1st \$3,000<sup>†</sup>
- 2nd \$1,700
- 3rd \$1,000

# LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Your Voice. Your Story. Your America.



An essay and video contest for high school students in the western United States, Guam and Northern Mariana Islands. Contest rules and entry instructions will be available at: <https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest>

Entries accepted beginning **January 7, 2026**. Deadline for entries is **March 13, 2026**. Sponsored by the United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit.

<sup>†</sup> Plus! Travel and accommodations to attend the 2026 Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference.

\* May be subject to federal, state or local taxes unless exemptions apply.

# LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Your Voice.  
Your Story.  
Your America.



In 2026, our nation will celebrate **250** years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence—a document that boldly declared “all men are created equal” and are granted by their Creator the “unalienable Rights” to **Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness**. It further proclaimed that to secure these rights, governments are instituted by consent of the governed. These words not only sparked a revolution but also set the foundation for the values we still strive to uphold today.

**Which of these rights sparks your interest to reflect on its meaning and impact?**

The Ninth Circuit Civics Contest prompt challenges you to choose one of these enduring rights—Life, Liberty or the Pursuit of Happiness—and tell us: (i) why this right was essential in 1776, (ii) how this right impacts you, your family or your community today; and (iii) what should we do to protect or improve this right moving forward?

The 2026 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest is open to all students, grades 9-12, in public, private, parochial or charter schools, and homeschooled students of equivalent grade status in nine western states and two Pacific island jurisdictions.

Contest rules will be available at <https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest>. Essay and video entries can be submitted on the website starting **Jan. 7, 2026**. Deadline to submit entries is 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time, **March 6, 2026**.

The contest is organized by the Ninth Circuit Public Information and Community Outreach (“PICO”) Committee. For more information contact the Ninth Circuit Office of the Circuit Executive at [civicscontest@ce9.uscourts.gov](mailto:civicscontest@ce9.uscourts.gov).



**Western District of Washington Local Contest:** The U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington will conduct judging for this contest and select their top three essay and video winners who will receive \$2,000 for 1st place, \$1,000 for 2nd place and \$500 for 3rd place. If there is a tie, the court will award two duplicate awards in 1st, 2nd or 3rd place. A total of \$2,000 will be awarded to 10 Honorable Mentions, five essays and five videos. For more details about the local contest, contact: Chief Deputy Clerk Eric Smits – (206) 370-8434 / [Eric\\_Smits@wawd.uscourts.gov](mailto:Eric_Smits@wawd.uscourts.gov) or Executive Director Tracy M. Morris, Federal Civil Rights Legal Clinic, FBA, Western Washington Chapter – (206) 992-7594 / [tracymmorris@comcast.net](mailto:tracymmorris@comcast.net).

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