



# United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

Office of the Circuit Executive · 95 7th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 · (415) 355-8800 · [mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov](mailto:mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov)

## NEWS RELEASE

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## **Students Advance as Finalists of 2026 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest**

**SAN FRANCISCO** – The 15 federal judicial districts in the Ninth Circuit have selected their local civics contest winners who are advancing as finalists in the preliminary round of the [2026 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest](#). The Ninth Circuit received a total of 1,043 essays and 185 videos from students addressing the contest theme, “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness—Your Voice. Your Story. Your America.” The theme celebrates the upcoming 250-year anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Judging panels are now reviewing the essays and videos that advanced to the preliminary round of the Ninth Circuit Civics Contest, which is organized by the circuit’s Public Information and Community Outreach (PICO) Committee. The PICO Committee will determine the final essay and video winners this month.

First-place winners at the Ninth Circuit level, along with a parent or guardian, will be invited to attend part of the 2026 Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference. A total of \$11,400 in cash prizes will be awarded to the winners. First place cash prize in each category is \$3,000, second place is \$1,700, and third place is \$1,000. If the winners of the video portion of the contest are part of a team, then they will split the total cash prize for each rank.

Circuit winners will be announced on the contest website: <https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest/> this month. Winners in each judicial district are listed in the following pages.

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## **District of Alaska**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Liam Cuddy, Robert Service High School, Anchorage; Second place (\$750) – Kenton Scribner, Upstream Learning, Glennallen; and Third place (\$500) – Bella Marsh, South Anchorage High School, Anchorage.

**Video Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Yedidia Diboue, West Anchorage High School, Anchorage; and Second place (\$750) – Sebastian Young, Homeschool, Wasilla.

## **District of Arizona**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Prisha Yelamanchili, BASIS Chandler, Chandler; Second place (\$750) – Zoe Edelstein, Shadow Mountain High School, Phoenix; and Third place (\$500) – Thomas Westmoreland, Andrada Polytechnic High School, Tucson.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$1,500) – the team of Vivan Patel, Mihir Sahani and Aayush Shah, BASIS Chandler; Second place (Total of \$750) – the team of Ishitha Kota and Bhavana Amba, BASIS Chandler; and Third place (Total of \$500) – the team of Elijah Agüero, Osvaldo Gomez Flores and Karl Grosskreutz, Gila Ridge High School, Yuma.

## **Central District of California**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,000) – Aashka Bhuptani, Redondo Union High School, Redondo Beach; Second place (\$750) – Suah Jin, Sunny Hills High School, Fullerton; and Third place (\$500) – Audrey Chiang, Arcadia High School, Arcadia.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$1,000) – Mahima Wuppalapati, Portola High School, Irvine; Second place (\$750) – Katelyn Cheng, Trinity Pacific Christian School, Westlake Village; and Third place (\$500) – the team of Johann Benitez and Anamarys Cordero-Meraz, Alliance Judy Ivie Burton Technology Academy High School, Los Angeles.

The Central District also extends an invitation to their first-place winners, and parent or guardian, to attend part of the 2026 Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference.

## **Eastern District of California**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Dylan Hakimi, Harmony Magnet Academy, Strathmore; Second place (\$750) – Dylan Aguayo, Harmony Magnet Academy, Strathmore; and Third place (\$500) – Elliott Rogozinski, George Washington Carver School of Arts and Science, Sacramento.

**Video Winner:** First place (Total of \$1,500) – the team of Miguel Lopez and Mariana Narez, Peter Johansen High School, Modesto; Second place (\$750), Danny Hussain, Sunnyside High School, Fresno; and Third Place (\$500) – Isaiah Santos, Sunnyside High School, Fresno.

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## **Northern District of California**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$2,000) – Aiden Tracy, Bellarmine College Preparatory, San Jose; Second place (\$1,500) – Bryce Noh, Evergreen Valley High School, San Jose; and Third place (\$1,000) – Jasmine Ye, The Quarry Lane School, Danville.

**Video Winners:** First place (\$2,000) – the team of Finlay Hayes and Shai Ring, Burlingame High School, Burlingame; Second place (\$1,500) – Ryan Chou, Westmoor High School, Daly City; and Third place (\$1,000) – Fiona Fisher, Marin Academy, San Rafael.

## **Southern District of California**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,000) – Milana Mauricio, Mt. Carmel High School, San Diego; Second place (\$500) – Natalie Amir-Lobel, La Jolla Country Day School, La Jolla; and Third place (\$250) – Deren Erdem, Westview High School, San Diego.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$1,000) – the team of Christian Hwong, Gerardo Perez and Joel Vargas, Herbert Hoover High School, San Diego; Second place (Total of \$500) – the team of Alexia Ortega, Dafne Sevillano and Samira Suzuki, Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School High School, Chula Vista; and Third place (\$250) – Adriel Regalado, Otay Ranch High School, Chula Vista.

## **District of Guam**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$300) – Mariana Castro, St. John's School, Tamuning; Second place (\$200) – Su Jin Oh, St. John's School, Tamuning; and Third place (\$100) – Reynold Borja, George Washington High School, Tamuning.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$300) – the team of Ryan Kong and Reine Sangcap, John F. Kennedy High School, Tamuning; Second place (\$200) – AveMaria Bigler, Notre Dame High School, Talo'fo'fo; and Third place (\$100) – Frances Elyn Bato, Simon Sanchez High School, Yigo.

## **District of Hawaii**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Tianyi Yang, Second place (\$750) – Kaleimaika'i Fasi and Third place (\$500) – Madeline Su. All students are from 'Iolani School, Honolulu.

**Video Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Aidan Cheng, Second place (\$750) – Reef Kutaka and Third place (\$500) – Chase Yamashita. All students are from 'Iolani School, Honolulu.

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## **District of Idaho**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,000) – Emma Shafer, Homeschool, Rathdrum; Second place (\$500) – Noah Williams, Canyon Ridge High School, Twin Falls; and Third place (\$250) – Trevor Auger, Capital High School, Boise.

**Video Winners:** First place (\$1,000) – Maliah Clawson, Boise High School, Boise; Second place (\$500) – Lauren Castaneda, Boise High School, Boise; and Third place (Total of \$250) – the team of Sophia Davidson, McKenna Miller and Aidrian Gilliland, Post Falls High School, Post Falls.

## **District of Montana**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$2,000) – Kaia Pinsondumm, Sentinel High School, Missoula; Second place (\$1,000) – Ada Calhoun, Anaconda High School, Anaconda; and Third place (\$500) – Eva Murray, Anaconda High School.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$2,000) – the team of Kalli Koteskey and Kaylee Lewis; Second place (\$1,000) – Anabelle Cox; and Third place (\$500) – Caleb Hass. All students are from Foothills Community Christian School, Great Falls.

## **District of Nevada**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Dmitri Grimmert, West Career and Technical Academy, Las Vegas; Second place (\$850) – Caden Lee, NV Learning Academy at CCSD, Las Vegas; and Third place (\$500) – Avery Gibson, Douglas High School, Minden.

**Video Winners:** First place (\$1,500) – Yifan Jia; Second place (Total of \$850) – the team of Nevina Min, Brooke Vanderlind and Juliana Vuong; and Third place (\$500) – Abbey Messner. All students are from West Career & Technical Academy, Las Vegas.

## **District of the Northern Mariana Islands**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$300) – Reggie Castro, Marianas High School, Saipan; Second place (\$200) – Alleena Villaluz, Saipan International School, Saipan; and Third place (\$100) – Jazzmine Apasan, Marianas High School, Saipan.

**Video Winners:** First place (\$200) – Jillian Reese Nicdao, Marianas High School, Saipan; Second place (Total of \$150) – the team of Lya Kim, Hyunyu Choi and Yeji Jang, Saipan International School, Saipan; and Third place (Total of \$100) – the team of Alleena Villaluz, Michael Guintu and James Xiong, Saipan International School, Saipan.

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## **District of Oregon**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,000) – Melissa Sobenn, Lincoln High School, Portland; Second place (\$750) – Chloe Zhang, Sherwood High School, Sherwood; and Third place (\$500) – Maily Quach, Central Catholic High School, Portland.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$1,000) – the team of Emma Lee, Derica Theobald and Miranda Yesser, Lincoln High School, Portland; Second place (\$750) – Sahara Oguamanam, Forest Grove High School, Forest Grove; and Third place (\$500) – Isbelcy Vidal Tinoco, Forest Grove High School, Forest Grove.

## **Eastern District of Washington**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$1,000) – Yaseen Alazawi, Richland High School, Richland; Second place (\$500) – Carter Pierce, Ridgeline High School, Liberty Lake; and Third place (\$250) – Ravi Ke, Mead High School, Spokane.

**Video Winners:** First place (Total of \$1,000) – the team of Ashley Conner and Jacqueline Wilkins-Walk, Mead High School, Spokane; Second place (\$500) – Dakota Davis, Spokane Valley Tech, Spokane Valley; and Third place (Total of \$250) – the team of Abigail Hill and Rylee Ware, Spokane Valley Tech, Spokane Valley.

## **Western District of Washington**

**Essay Winners:** First place (\$2,000) – Vanessa Brooke, Anacortes High School, Anacortes; Second place (\$1,000) – Stanley Huang, Newport High School, Bellevue; and Third place (\$500) – Akshay Murthy, Bothell High School, Bothell.

**Video Winner:** First place (\$2,000) – Lale Kutlu, Lincoln High School, Seattle; Second place (\$1,000) – Xavier Gatlin, Lakeside School, Seattle; and Third place (Total of \$500) – the team of Sophie Bartscher and Paige Weiskopf, Seattle Academy, Seattle.

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