



Public Information Office
United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ninth Circuit Announces 2018 Civics Contest Winners

SAN FRANCISCO – Young people from Arizona and California have been selected the winners of the 2018 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest, an educational outreach effort to high school students sponsored by the federal courts.

The theme of the 2018 contest was “The 14th Amendment 150 Years After Ratification: What Does Equal Protection Mean to Students?” Students were asked to write an essay or produce a short video explaining how Congress and the federal courts have applied the Equal Protection Clause to public education, whether in admissions, classrooms or on the athletic fields.

Winners in the essay competition were:

- 1st place – Kelsey Luu, a senior at Irvington High School in Fremont, California;
- 2nd place – James Freedman, a sophomore at Torrey Pines High School in San Diego, California; and
- 3rd place – Kayla Pebdani, a sophomore at La Costa Canyon High School in Carlsbad, California.

Winners in the video competition were:

- 1st place – Veronica Yu, Cindy Law and Karen Thai, seniors at Arcadia High School in Arcadia, California;
- 2nd place – Robert Lowell, Desarae Millet and Mariah Vasquez, seniors at Walden Grove High School in Sahuarita, Arizona; and
- 3rd place – Ivan Velasco and Natalia Escobedo, seniors at Coronado High School in Coronado, California.

The winning essay will be read and winning video shown on July 23, 2018, during the opening session of the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference in Anaheim, California, a major gathering of the federal bench and bar from the western states. Essays and videos from all of the finalists will be posted to the contest website – www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest – in early July.

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The competition was open to students in grades 9-12 in public, private and parochial schools and home-schooled students of equivalent grade status in nine western states and two Pacific island jurisdictions. Approximately 1,300 young people entered the contest, which offered cash prizes, an opportunity for travel, and a chance to meet some of the nation's preeminent jurists and legal practitioners.

Federal courts in all 15 judicial districts in the Ninth Circuit held local contests with winners going on to compete in the circuit-wide competition. In all, 45 essays and 27 videos were selected for final consideration by the Ninth Circuit Courts and Community Committee, which organized the contest. Blind judging was employed in both the preliminary and final rounds.

"We were extremely pleased to have had so many students participate in the contest. The winning essays and videos were outstanding, demonstrating a clear understanding of the nature and importance of the Equal Protection Clause," said U.S. District Judge Janis L. Sammartino of San Diego, who chairs the Ninth Circuit Courts and Community Committee.

At the circuit level, prizes of \$2,000, \$1,000 and \$500 will be awarded to 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-place winners in both the writing and video competition. In addition, first-place winners along with a parent/guardian will be invited to attend the opening session of the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference.

Prize money and travel costs for the winners are funded through attorney admission fees collected by the federal courts to fund educational programs for the bar and community. Contributions were received from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and the federal courts in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, the U.S. Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Ninth Circuit Courts and Community Committee was established in 2000 by the Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit, the governing body for federal courts in the West. The committee seeks to promote public understanding of and confidence in the judicial system through civic education and outreach to the community and media. The committee includes federal judges, lawyers, and court staff. This is the fifth consecutive year in which the committee has organized a civics contest in conjunction with the circuit conference.

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