

NEWS FROM THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

January 13, 2026

Philadelphia – The Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee of the Judicial Council of the Third Circuit announced today that it is hosting an essay contest for elementary students focused on civics, citizenship, and the concept of whether the Constitution addresses grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence. **The essay prompt is: Does the United States Constitution address the grievances in the Declaration of Independence? If so, explain how.**

The Third Judicial Circuit is comprised of the U.S. Court of Appeals as well as the Federal District Courts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The latter are trial courts, which include bankruptcy courts. Chief Circuit Judge Michael A. Chagares noted that “It is incumbent on us, as federal judges, to engage with our youth and to offer a robust civics education program.” The Committee and its members are partnering with bar associations, civic organizations, and educational institutions across the geographical reach of the Third Circuit to promote and oversee the essay contest.

The essay may be written by either an individual student or by an entire class. If a class essay, students within a participating class should work together to write the essay. That means that only one essay is submitted on behalf of the Class. Individual and class essays must be submitted on or before Tuesday, March 31, 2026. The best individual and class essays in each district (District of Delaware, District of New Jersey, Eastern District

of Pennsylvania, Middle District of Pennsylvania, Western District of Pennsylvania, and the District of the Virgin Islands) of the Third Circuit will be invited to one of the nine courthouses in the Third Circuit to present their essays during the first weeks of May, in celebration of Law Day. The individual and class essays will be judged separately based on focus, content development, organization, and style. Prizes will be awarded.

Circuit Judge D. Brooks Smith, who chairs the Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee overseeing the contest, stated “Our hope is that the topic for this year will inspire our young citizens to learn what ‘independence’ meant to America’s Revolutionary generation. It is only by gaining an understanding of both how and why American colonists sought independence from a king can we come to know how precious the gift of freedom truly is.”

For more information about the essay contest, please visit the Third Circuit Court of Appeals website at <https://ca3ccrofl.powerappsportals.us/> or contact 267-299-4306.