



Richard K. Gilbert
**POLICY
ADVOCACY
COMPETITION**

Hosted by DC Justice Lab



MARCH 2, 2024

John A. Wilson Building,
Council of the District of Columbia



CHALLENGE AND MOTIVATION

Every day, our communities face challenges that demand collective action — gun violence, access to education, access to healthcare, just to name a few.

Addressing these challenges often requires governmental action, including enacting or amending laws. However, advocates, community members, and even government employees find that the legislation presented often falls short of our shared ambitions. One way to increase the quality of legislation is by building law students' skills in crafting and passing legislation.

ABOUT THE EVENT

DC Justice Lab is organizing a law school competition (in the style of mock trial and moot court) focused on legislative advocacy. It will bring together law school students, lawmakers, lawyers, and advocates. The event will be a competition for the students and a celebration of the role of legislative advocacy and DC Justice Lab. We hope to generate excitement among law students for legislative advocacy and careers in the field. Additionally, the competition is an opportunity for students to build their legal skills in the policy realm, including legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, and written and oral communication. It also may produce ideas for legislation that could lead to real change.

Another goal of the competition is to diversify the pipeline of talent for legislative staff and policy advocacy fields. In its inaugural year, the competition will be open to students from any law school, but recruitment of participants will focus on law schools in the D.C.-area and at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).



TEAMS

This year we will have eight teams competing (one team per law school, two students per team), with the number of teams increasing in future years.

FORMAT

Teams will respond to the competition problem with proposed legislation and a fact sheet explaining their proposal. Then, mock legislative hearings will test teams' oral advocacy on behalf of their bills. These hearings will take place at the seat of the D.C. Council and Mayor, the John A. Wilson Building. Teams will be scored by judges on their written work and oral advocacy, advancing through rounds tournament-style.



JUDGES

Judges will be attorneys, lawmakers, and public policy professionals, recruited by DC Justice Lab for their expertise in policy advocacy.

Confirmed judges include Phil Mendelson and Councilmembers Christina Henderson, Brooke Pinto, Robert White, and Zacahary Parker!



PRIZE

The competition will conclude with an awards presentation and reception. The winning team will receive a \$5,000 prize to help cover students' academic expenses, particularly in light of the limited resources for students pursuing public-interest careers.



KEY DATES

**NOVEMBER
15, 2023**

Registration opens.

**JANUARY
10, 2024**

Registration closes & problem released.

**JANUARY
17, 2024**

Requests for rules or problem clarification due.

**FEBRUARY
10, 2024**

Written submission due.

**MARCH
2, 2024**

Three rounds of oral advocacy & awards reception.



HONOREE

RICHARD K. GILBERT



The event honors Richard K. Gilbert, a champion of legal justice who believed that lawyers must not only help individual clients, but also help society at large by changing laws for the better. While representing clients in local and federal criminal cases for 40 years, Rich was a founding member of the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project, served on the board of directors for the Council for Court Excellence and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and actively participated in the drafting of standard jury instructions for the District of Columbia. Rich was an adjunct professor at American University Washington College of Law, a forceful advocate for criminal justice reform, and a mentor to DC Justice Lab's founding executive director. The Gilbert Policy Advocacy Competition honors Rich's passion and his mentorship of younger lawyers to become change agents.

A CHAMPION OF LEGAL JUSTICE

ABOUT DC JUSTICE LAB



DCJL.

Launched in 2020 with students from George Washington University Law School, DC Justice Lab is a team of law and policy experts researching, organizing, and advocating for large-scale changes to the District of Columbia's criminal legal system. We develop smarter safety solutions that are evidence-driven, community-rooted, and racially just. We aim to fully transform the District's approach to public safety and make it a national leader in justice reform.

Students working with DC Justice Lab learn how attorneys fulfill an active and supportive role in shaping local policies that directly affect daily life. At the outset, they are encouraged to consider what social problems and solutions have been overlooked and to investigate why. This requires analyzing statutes, case law, court rules, administrative orders, and common practices. It also requires listening to organizers and people who are justice-impacted about which rules are followed and to what effect.

CONTACT

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