

Rules for the 2025 Richard K. Gilbert Policy Advocacy Competition

June 26, 2024

I. Timeline

November 1, 2024: Registration closes at noon.

November 22, 2024: Problem released at noon.

December 4, 2024: Requests for rules or problem clarification due by noon.

January 29, 2025: Written submission due by noon.

March 29, 2025: Oral advocacy rounds & awards reception.

II. Registration

Teams must register at <https://dcjusticelab.org/policy-advocacy-competition/> by noon on November 1, 2024. A team consists of two students matriculated at a law school. The competition will accept no more than one team from any individual law school. In the event that two teams from the same school register, DCJL will work with the school to identify which team will represent the school.

The first eight teams to register will be selected as competitors for the program. Any team that registers thereafter will be placed on a waitlist and notified that in the event one of the first eight registered teams ultimately cannot compete, a replacement team will be selected from the waitlist in order of registration date.

Registration fee: \$300.

No team member may be replaced without good cause.

No team member may receive a J.D. prior to March 29, 2024.

By registering, team members grant a release to DC Justice Lab to use all submitted written work and photos and videos from the competition.

III. Problem

The problem will be released on November 22, 2024, after the competing teams are confirmed. The problem will present a simulated factual scenario involving criminal law or procedure and constitutional law. Teams will submit a solution to this problem with proposed legislative language and a fact sheet explaining their bill and advocating for its adoption. Then, teams will orally advocate for their legislative proposals at mock legislative hearings.

For both the written submission and oral advocacy, teams may research and reference real-life experiences, statutes, case law, secondary legal sources, social or other scientific research, and existing public opinion surveys, but may not include made-up statistics or imaginary “facts”. Teams may extrapolate or analogize from actual factual scenarios, research, or polling.

Teams must request any clarification of the problem or rules by emailing gilbert(at)dcjusticelab.org by noon on December 4, 2024.

IV. Written advocacy

Teams will be issued anonymous identification numbers to use in lieu of their school affiliation. Teams must not include any other identifying information on their written work product, so that all submissions can be scored anonymously. Teams must submit their written work product through <https://dcjusticelab.org/policy-advocacy-competition/> by noon on January 29, 2025. The written submission must consist of (1) draft legislation and (2) a two-page document summarizing and explaining the proposed solution. Teams shall submit these documents as one PDF. Teams shall also submit a certification that they have complied with the rules of the competition in preparing the work product.

The proposed legislation must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. The legislation must be no longer than five pages. Teams shall follow the [D.C. Council's 2019 drafting manual](#) in drafting the legislation and will receive a template with the problem. The accompanying fact sheet must be in Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins. The fact sheet must be no longer than two pages, i.e., one doubled-sided page when printed.

The content of the written submission must be original material. Teams shall receive no outside assistance with the drafting of the written submission, including from coaches. However, coaches may support teams in generally discussing and thinking through the problem and possible solutions. Coaches also may direct the team to resources, such as materials on effective policy writing, legislative drafting, or making persuasive arguments.

Upon submission of the written work product, each team's submission will be made available to all teams for review to assist in preparation for the oral advocacy rounds.

After scoring is complete, teams will receive feedback from competition judges on their written submission.

V. Oral advocacy

The oral advocacy component of the competition will occur on March 29, 2025, at the John A. Wilson District Building, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington DC. Teams will participate in mock legislative hearings, advocating for their legislative proposals and answering questions from a panel of three judges. Each team member will have three minutes to present testimony. After all teams have testified, each judge will have seven minutes to ask questions (ten minutes in the final round).

Teams may divide the content of their testimony in whatever way they see fit. Teams should have written testimony for reference but need not read it verbatim, nor will any written testimony be reviewed or graded. Teams may bring other notes or materials into the hearing that they may

wish to reference during their testimony or questioning. If a team member does not conclude their testimony within three minutes, the chairperson will remind them to end their testimony. Failure to follow the time limits or the chairperson's instructions can reduce a team's score.

During oral advocacy rounds, teams must not state any identifying information beyond their name and competition-issued identification number.

The oral advocacy component will consist of three rounds:

Round 1

In the first round, all teams will compete in pairs by participating in mock legislative hearings. The team from each first-round pairing with the highest cumulative score based on their written submission and the first round of oral advocacy will advance to the semi-final round.

Semi-final Round

In the semi-final round, four teams that advanced from the first round will compete in pairs in mock legislative hearings. The highest-scoring team (based on their oral advocacy scores) from each of the two semi-final round hearings will advance to the final round.

Final Round

In the Final Round, the final two teams will compete in a mock legislative hearing. The team with the highest oral advocacy score for the round will be declared the winner and the other finalist will be named the runner-up.

Teams may adapt their testimony or responses to questions based on other testimony, questions, or responses. However, teams may not copy the statements or phrasing of another team without credit.

Coaches may not communicate with teams during the mock legislative hearings, but may give feedback to team members between rounds. Coaches and others outside of the team can support a team's development of oral advocacy skills by providing feedback on their presentations and answers to practice questions.

At the conclusion of each round, judges will provide teams with feedback on their oral advocacy. Prior to the oral advocacy day, the competition will check with all judges for possible conflicts. With the exception of the final round, no judge will participate in a hearing that includes a team member with whom the judge has any pre-existing relationship, professional or personal. The Chairman of the Council will be a judge in the final round, and in the event that a team member with whom he has a pre-existing relationship reaches that round, he will maintain the utmost neutrality in judging the teams.

VI. Scoring

Teams' written submissions and oral advocacy in each round will each be scored using a rubric of 50 points. See below for descriptions of the criteria. The rubrics will be shared with the teams with the problem release.

Written submission criteria:

- **Policy and societal impact:** The proposal should effectively and ethically address the problem as described. It should consider and explain the impact on various stakeholder groups.
- **Strong legal analysis, supporting evidence, and research:** The proposal should demonstrate a solid understanding of existing laws, precedents, and legal principles related to the problem at hand. It should also include any other research or evidence necessary to support the proposed solution.
- **Implementation feasibility:** The proposal should examine the practicality and feasibility of the proposed solution. The proposal should consider the real-world implications and logistics of implementation.
- **Clarity of language, organization, and appropriate style.** The proposal should clearly convey the ideas, arguments, and proposed legislation. It should have a logical structure, and it should be succinct. It should not include any grammatical errors.
- **Innovation and creativity.** The proposal should introduce fresh and creative ideas to tackle the problem.

Oral advocacy criteria:

- **Policy and societal impact:** The oral advocacy should effectively and ethically address the problem as described. This should complement the written submission.
- **Presentation and rhetorical skills:** The oral advocacy should include the use of persuasive language, tone, and delivery. The advocate should manage allotted time efficiently and deliver a presentation that is easy to understand.
- **Organization of testimony:** The oral advocacy should be logically organized, build a compelling narrative, and address the proposal's strengths, weaknesses, and counterarguments.
- **Demonstrated knowledge of law and evidence:** The oral advocacy should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the relevant legal information and any other facts or data related to the legislative proposal.
- **Response to questions:** The oral advocacy should demonstrate the ability to respond to questions from judges in a way that is clear and direct, enhancing understanding of the issue.

For the first round of oral advocacy, teams' written and oral scores will be weighted equally to establish an overall score—the team in each pairing with the highest combined score will advance to the semifinal round. For the semi-final and final rounds, teams' oral advocacy scores alone will be considered. Teams' written scores will be used to break ties.

Teams will receive feedback from judges on their written submission and oral advocacy performance, but will not receive their scores.

VII. Assistance

Team members shall receive no outside assistance with their written submission. Coaches may not help with drafting or editing the written submissions but may help the teams think through the issues and approaches. Coaches may discuss the problem and issues generally and may

point teams to resources for further research and skills development. Coaches and others may also help teams to practice their oral advocacy.

Team members and coaches shall not discuss the rules, problem, laws, strategy, or scoring with any competition judges. Team members and coaches shall not seek or receive any advice, feedback, or coaching from competition judges, aside from the feedback that will be provided immediately after each mock legislative hearing round. Team members and coaches shall not disclose to any judges which school they represent until after the competition has concluded.

Team members and coaches may not communicate with DC Justice Lab staff about the competition, aside from seeking clarification regarding the problem or rules by the appropriate deadlines, asking questions about oral advocacy day logistics, or submitting grievances.

VIII. Grievance and rules violations

Grievances may concern any alleged violations of the competition rules or inconsistent interpretation or application of the competition rules.

Grievances regarding written submissions shall be sent to [gilbert\(at\)dcjusticelab.org](mailto:gilbert(at)dcjusticelab.org) prior to noon on February 19, 2025. These grievances will be resolved prior to oral advocacy rounds.

Grievances regarding oral advocacy shall be made immediately upon conclusion of the oral advocacy round where the violation is alleged to have occurred, by email to [gilbert\(at\)dcjusticelab.org](mailto:gilbert(at)dcjusticelab.org) or approaching the designated DC Justice Lab staff member. Grievances will be resolved by the Executive Director of the DC Justice Lab or her designee.

Violation of the rules, including late written submissions, failure to include a certificate of compliance, or failure to adhere to time limits on oral advocacy, may result in disqualification or points reduction.

IX. Awards reception

Following the conclusion of the Final Round, all competing teams, judges, and coaches are invited to an awards reception. The reception will recognize the winning team of the competition, the runner-up team, the best written submission, and the best oral advocate.

The team that wins the final round will receive an award and a prize of \$5,000, to be split evenly among the two team members.

The runner-up team from the final round will receive an award.

The individual team member with the best oral advocacy score during the first round of the competition will receive an award for best oral advocate.

The team with the highest score on its written submission will receive an award for best written advocacy.