Rules for the 2027 Richard K. Gilbert Policy Advocacy Competition

I. Timeline

November 2, 2026: Registration closes at noon.
November 13, 2026: Problem released at noon.
December 7, 2026: Requests for rules or problem clarification due by noon.
January 20, 2027: Written submission due by noon.
Saturday, March 13, 2027: Office Visit with a Staffer via Zoom.
Saturday, April 3, 2027: In-Person Mock Legislative Hearing Oral Advocacy Rounds & Awards Reception at the John A. Wilson Building.

II. Registration

Teams must register at https://dcjusticelab.org/policy-advocacy-competition/ by noon on November 2, 2026. A team consists of two students matriculating at an ABA-approved 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, the first team that registers will represent the school notwithstanding the school's rules.

The first eight qualified teams to register will be selected as competitors for the program. Any team that registers thereafter will be placed on a waitlist and receive a refund. 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. Please contact Miryam Elshaer at miryam@dcjusticelab.org with requests to substitute team members and include the reason for the substitution.

No team member may receive a J.D. prior to April 3, 2027.

By registering, team members grant DC Justice Lab permission to use all submitted written work, photos, and videos from the competition for future promotion of the event.

III. Problem

The problem will be released on November 13, 2026, 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 a mock staffer visit and mock legislative hearings.

In addition to the problem, teams will receive an audio clip of District community members discussing the problem topic to provide further insight into how residents feel about this problem and the impact it has on their lives.

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 7, 2026.**

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 20, 2027. 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, including their team number in the footer of each page. 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 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins. The fact sheet must be no longer than two pages, i.e., one double-sided page when printed.

The written submission must be original material. Generative AI software may be used to perform research in ways similar to search engines, such as Google. Generative AI software may

also be used to check spelling and grammar. Coaches may help the teams think through the issues and approaches, point them to resources, and offer feedback, but must not draft or otherwise provide language to the competitors.

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 – Office Visit with a Staffer via Zoom

The first oral advocacy component of the competition will occur **Saturday, March 13, 2027**. Each team will participate in a mock staffer "office visit" with two judges acting as staffers via Zoom. Each judge will receive the team's fact sheet and legislation, the problem, and a summary of the community perspectives on this issue. Teams will have to advocate for their legislative proposals and answer questions. Teams must not state any identifying information beyond their name and competition-issued identification number.

The office visit will occur for 25 minutes. Following the 25 minutes, the judges will have 10 minutes to score students individually and as a team. The time will end with the last 10 minutes for feedback to help prepare the students for the in-person Oral Advocacy Day featuring mock legislative hearings. Coaches may not communicate with teams during the mock staffer visit, but may give feedback to team members following the conclusion of the visit. 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.

Prior to the mock staffer visit, the competition will check with all judges for possible conflicts. DCJL will work to the best of our ability to ensure that no judge participates in a mock visit that includes a team member with whom the judge has any pre-existing professional or personal relationship.

VI. Oral Advocacy Day – Mock Legislative Hearings at the John A. Wilson Building

The last oral advocacy component of the competition will occur on **Saturday, April 3, 2027**, at the John A. Wilson 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).

During oral advocacy rounds, teams must not state any identifying information beyond their name and competition-issued identification number. Teams may not observe the first two opening rounds, but may observe the semi-finals and finals.

Teams may divide the content of their testimony in whatever way they see fit. Teams should have written testimony for reference, but should 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.

The mock hearings will consist of three rounds:

Round 1

In the first round, all teams will compete in pairs 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 semi-final round is seeded, meaning the team with the highest oral advocacy score that advances will compete against the team with the lowest oral advocacy score that advances. The 2nd and 3rd-best oral advocacy scoring teams will compete against each other. 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 mock legislative hearings, the DCJL will check with all judges for possible conflicts. With the exception of the final round, DCJL will work to the best of our ability to ensure that 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.

VII. Scoring

Teams' written submissions will be scored using a 100-point rubric. Teams' oral advocacy will be scored using a 50-point rubric. See below for descriptions of the criteria. The rubrics will be shared with the teams with the problem release. Each criterion includes specific sub-points to guide evaluation and performance descriptors for scoring consistency.

***Note:** The scoring criteria describe the full range of what judges will consider when awarding points. Teams are not expected to address every sub-point exhaustively in the written or oral portions. The strongest advocacy will strategically prioritize the most relevant and persuasive elements given the fact pattern, using the allotted space and time to make a clear, compelling, and well-supported case.

This competition is also a learning opportunity. The rubric is designed to guide scoring and help judges provide constructive feedback. The goal is not a "perfect" score; the goal is to develop and strengthen advocacy skills. Guided by the rubric, judges are encouraged to accompany scores with comments that identify strengths and offer concrete suggestions for growth.

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, while identifying the core problems and articulating specific or measurable benefits for the community.
- **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, while citing credible, relevant nonlegal sources that support the proposal.
- **Implementation feasibility:** The proposal should examine the practicality and feasibility of the proposed solution. It should consider the real-world implications and logistics of implementation, addressing the operational realities in the fact pattern. It should also consider potential unintended consequences and how they might be mitigated.

- **Writing, Clarity, and Organization:** 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, offering a bold but realistic solution that is grounded in evidence or precedent.
- **Community-Centered Approach**: The proposal should incorporate perspectives of directly impacted people directly or through secondary research, reflecting racial justice as a clear consideration.

Oral advocacy criteria for mock office visit and mock legislative hearings:

- **Policy and societal impact**: The oral advocacy should clearly and succinctly convey the core problems from the fact pattern, complementing the written submission.
- **Presentation and rhetorical skills**: Oral advocacy should include the use of persuasive language, tone, and delivery. The advocate should manage allotted time efficiently and deliver an easy-to-understand presentation.
- **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. It should reference credible sources to strengthen points.
- **Response to questions:** The oral advocacy should demonstrate the ability to respond to questions from judges clearly and directly, enhancing understanding of the issue.

Following the mock staffer visit and first round of mock legislative hearings, 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.

Among the teams that advance to the semi-final round, the highest oral scoring team and the fourth highest oral scoring team will compete against each other, and the second and third highest oral scoring teams will compete. For the semi-final and final rounds, teams' oral advocacy scores alone will be considered. Teams' written scores will be used to break ties in the semi-final and final rounds.

Teams will receive feedback from judges on their written submission and oral advocacy performance, but will not receive their scores. Teams will receive score sheets the week after the competition, but not before or between rounds.

VIII. 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, while offering feedback. 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.

IX. 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 prior to noon on February 19, 2027. 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 or approaching the designated DC Justice Lab staff member. Grievances will be resolved by the Chief Executive Officer of 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.

X. 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 **$3,000,** to be split evenly among the two team members.

The runner-up team from the final round will receive an award and a **$1,000** prize to be split evenly between the two team members.

The individual team member with the best oral advocacy score during the first round of the mock legislative hearings 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.**

Polling our community members, the team that best responded to the concerns raised by them in the written advocacy will receive the **Community Choice Award**.