

OFFICE OF THE CLERK  
**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

Robert H. Jackson  
United States Courthouse  
2 Niagara Square  
Buffalo, New York 14202  
Phone: 716-551-1700  
Fax: 716-551-1705

**MARY C. LOEWENGUTH**  
CLERK OF COURT  
  
**PATRICK J. HEALY**  
CHIEF DEPUTY CLERK

Kenneth B. Keating  
Federal Building  
100 State Street, Rm 6070  
Rochester, New York 14614  
Phone: 585-613-4000  
Fax: 585-613-4035

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
April 28, 2025

**Contact:**  
Patrick J. Healy  
Chief Deputy Clerk  
716-551-1770  
[Patrick\\_healy@nywd.uscourts.gov](mailto:Patrick_healy@nywd.uscourts.gov)

**THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW  
YORK ANNOUNCES THE FINALISTS IN ITS 125TH ANNIVERSARY ESSAY  
CONTEST AND MOCK ARGUMENT COMPETITION**

The United States District Court for the Western District of New York's 125th Anniversary Civic Outreach Program brought volunteer attorneys into public and charter high schools throughout the District during January and February of this year to teach a curriculum centered on the Supreme Court's decision in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943). Students who participated in the Outreach Program were eligible to compete in the Court's 125th Anniversary Essay Contest, which asked students to apply *Barnette* and its analysis of the First Amendment protection against compelled speech to school policies. After reviewing many well-written and insightful submissions, on March 19, 2025, the Court selected the following winners of the Essay Contest:

**First Place: Julian Rivera**

Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES, LoGuidice Educational Center

**Second Place: Christina Zastrow**

BOCES LoGuidice

**Third Place: Olivia Spanitz**

Iroquois Senior High School

The Court also recognized the accomplishments of the following Honorable Mention recipients from the Essay Contest:

**Reece Beiter** (Iroquois), **Tim Domino, Jr.** (Iroquois), **Ava Driggs** (Iroquois), **Natalia Elliott** (BOCES LoGuidice), **Megan Machin** (Tapestry Charter High School), **Alexis Michalek** (Iroquois), **Finn Mingle** (Tapestry), **Aaliyah Molson** (Tapestry), and **Reina White** (Tapestry)

The Outreach Program culminated on April 9, 2025, at the Robert H. Jackson United States Courthouse, where some of the Essay Contest finalists participated in the 125th Anniversary Mock Argument Competition. Participants argued the positions they took in their essays and addressed questions from a three-judge panel comprised of Chief District Judge Elizabeth A. Wolford, District Judge Meredith A. Vacca, and Magistrate Judge Mark W. Pedersen. At the conclusion of the competition, the following winners were announced:

**First Place: Olivia Spanitz**

**Second Place: Finn Mingle and Christina Zastrow (tied)**

The Court also recognized the accomplishments of the following Honorable Mention recipients from the Mock Argument Competition:

**Natalia Elliott, Aaliyah Molson, Julian Rivera, and Reina White**

The Court congratulates all of the finalists who will receive cash awards and be recognized at the Court's May 7, 2025 celebration event. The Court also thanks all of the participating students, teachers, schools, and volunteer attorneys.

In the fall of 2026, the Court, in partnership with the Supreme Court Historical Society, will host The Supreme Court and My Hometown Program, an immersive, in-person civics education program for high school students. For details about the program, please see: <https://supremecourthistory.org/supreme-court-civics-resources/supreme-court-and-my-hometown-application/>. Additional details will be posted on the Court's website (<https://www.nywd.uscourts.gov/>) later this year.

###