

COMPETITION KICKOFF

Prior to the pandemic, the CT Kids Court Essay Competition would kick off in May with Kids Speak, an event held at the University of Connecticut school of law. Kids Speak provided an opportunity for students to participate in group exercises, improvisations, debates, and to hear from a panel of experts on diversity issues, educational equity, anti-bullying, and school climate. The Kids Court Competition will proceed without a kickoff.

COMPETITION RULES

Students interested in participating in Kids Court must select one of the five topics listed in this brochure and write a short paper about their chosen topic. Paper length varies depending on division. Papers that don't meet page length requirements will not be reviewed.

Division A- Grades 9-12 papers must be no fewer than two pages and no longer than three pages.

Division B- Grades 6-8 papers must be no fewer than one page and no longer than two pages



COMPETITION JUDGING

The papers will be judged on the student's understanding of the topic, consistency of argument, persuasiveness, civil rights issues addressed, creativity, and thoughtfulness. The five Division A and five Division B students receiving the highest scores on their paper will have an opportunity to compete for prizes in the oral Kids Court on June 4, 2026, at 4:30. Whether in-person or virtual TBD.

PRIZES

Students may win prizes such as a medal, certificate, plaque, citation from the legislature or governor, and/or cash prizes ranging from \$25.00 to \$350.00.

FOR ELIGIBILITY

All papers must contain a cover page, which includes the student's name, grade, school, town, email address (or telephone number if the student does not have an email address), and title of the paper. All papers must be double-spaced and 12- point font or legibly handwritten. Please submit via email to the addresses provided below by 5:00 p.m. May 1, 2026.

Late submissions will not be accepted.

Cheryl.Sharp@ct.gov AND
Kellye.Hudson@ct.gov

Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities



Presents:

2026

Kids Court Competition

Tanya A. Hughes, Executive Director

Attorney Cheryl A. Sharp, Deputy Executive Director

Ana Mitchell, Outreach Coordinator

Please send your submissions to

Cheryl.Sharp@ct.gov AND
Kellye.Hudson@ct.gov

KIDS COURT 2026

Kids Court is an essay Competition related to the topic of civil and human rights and social justice. The Competition is for middle and high school students in the state of Connecticut. The Competition will raise students' consciousness regarding civil and human rights, diversity, school climate and culture, anti-bullying, equal protection, neighborhood isolation and housing, educational equity, health equity, individuality, and much, much more!

PURPOSE

- To support the development of youth leadership and raise consciousness about civil and human rights for all within Connecticut and New England.
- To reduce prejudice and create school environments that encourage mutual respect among students and faculty alike.
- To dissuade discriminatory bullying.
- To assist students in developing debating, writing, and analytical reasoning skills.
- To expose students to legislative and law-making processes.



HISTORY

In 1993, then UConn Law School students Cheryl Sharp and Rae Thiesfield-Vann, developed and launched the first Kids Court Competition in the greater Hartford area to educate students about diversity and civil and human rights issues.

After receiving approval from the governor's office in 1996, Attorneys Sharp and Thiesfield-Vann co-chaired the first statewide Kids Court Competition and Kids Speak event. The Competition, sponsored by the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, successfully ran for five straight years, allowing thousands of students to participate.



In 2000, Kids Court was selected by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as one of the best practice award winners, and received the "Simply the Best" award. Kids Court has been featured on Fox 61 news, WFSB 3 and in local papers throughout the state. The CT Bar Association recognized the CT Kids Court program at the 2023 Celebrate with the Stars award celebration.

The 2026 CT Kids Court Competition promises to be an exciting Competition, as social justice and civil and human rights are at the forefront of national conversations.

KIDS COURT TOPICS

Unhoused: Help!

The Housing crisis is a serious matter. What can be done to address the millions of unhoused?

Immigration Crisis Emergency (ICE)

Controversy concerning Immigration is buckling our nation. What policies or practices should be developed or changed to address this crisis?

Hands up, See me, Protect my peace

Explore the relationship between the police and various communities.

Speak to me!!

Language access is a growing problem in the US. An individual's ability to communicate and understand what is being communicated affects their outcomes. What can we do?

Don't Bully, Be a Buddy

Bullying in schools and on social media can be harmful. What can we do to stop it?

LGBTQIA+ - We Hear You!!

As the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community are rolled back, what action must be taken to protect this community?

Any student currently enrolled in grades six through twelve, who attends a Connecticut, Massachusetts, or New York school, or is home schooled in these states, is eligible to participate.