

NEWS FROM THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

December 5, 2023

Philadelphia – The Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee of the Judicial Council of the Third Circuit announced today that it is hosting an essay contest for **5th and 6th grade classes** focused on civics, citizenship, and the concept of “why juries are important to our democratic society.” The essay prompt is: “Why is the Right to a Jury Trial Important?”

The Third Judicial Circuit is comprised of the U.S. Court of Appeals as well as the Federal District Courts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The latter are trial courts, which include bankruptcy courts. Chief Circuit Judge Michael A. Chagares noted that “It is incumbent on us, as federal judges, to engage with our youth and to offer a robust civics education program.” The Committee and its members are partnering with bar associations, civic organizations, and educational institutions across the geographical reach of the Third Circuit to promote and oversee the essay contest.

This is a Class essay. Ideally, the class should work together to write the essay, so that only one essay is submitted on behalf of the Class. Class essays must be submitted on or before Friday, March 29, 2024. Classes submitting the best essays in each district (District of Delaware, District of New Jersey, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Middle District of Pennsylvania, Western District of Pennsylvania, and the District of the Virgin Islands) of the Third Circuit will be invited to one of the nine

courthouses in the Third Circuit to present their essays during the first weeks of May, in celebration of Law Day. The essays and presentations will be evaluated based on focus, content development, organization, and style. Prizes will be awarded.

Circuit Judge D. Brooks Smith, who chairs the Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee overseeing the contest, stated “The citizen jury is central to our country’s criminal and civil justice systems. The accused in a criminal case, and a party in most civil cases, has a constitutional right to be tried by a jury of his or her peers. That right is deeply embedded in the legal traditions of England, and later, the American colonies. It is important that young Americans know this part of their heritage. And it is critical that they understand that, as adult citizens, they will have a solemn obligation to answer a call to jury service if and when they receive it.”

For more information about the essay contest, please visit the Third Circuit Court of Appeals website at <https://www.ca3.uscourts.gov/> or contact 267-299-4306.