



The Sixth Circuit Civics and Outreach Committee is hosting our **Fifth Sixth Circuit-wide Civics Contest**! Students in grades 9-12 from Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee are encouraged to submit an original graphic Public Service Campaign poster and accompanying description (500-word maximum) examining the significance of the **Declaration of Independence** and its role in the Judiciary. The top entry receives a cash prize!

### **Prompt & Guidelines**

#### **250 Years of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness — The Judiciary’s Role in Upholding America’s Promise**

In 2026, our nation commemorates 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence—a document that proclaimed that “all men are created equal” and endowed with the unalienable rights to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. These revolutionary ideas not only sparked the birth of a nation but also established the enduring principles that continue to guide us.

For more than two centuries, the judiciary has played a vital role in interpreting, protecting, and giving life to these ideals. Through its decisions, the courts have shaped the meaning of equality, expanded the understanding of liberty, and ensured that the rule of law remains a cornerstone of our democracy. Judges, juries, and the justice system as a whole help safeguard the rights envisioned in 1776 and adapt them to the challenges of each new era.

#### **Your challenge**

Create an original graphic poster and provide a written description of your poster that conveys the connection between the Declaration’s founding promises and the judiciary’s role in upholding them. Consider how the courts have influenced the nation’s journey toward justice, fairness, and equal rights across 250 years. The written description should explain the civic message behind the artwork and show how the poster is meant to educate or inspire the public. While the image captures attention, the description clarifies how the symbols, colors, and design choices connect the Declaration of Independence to the judiciary’s role in protecting rights. By explaining the purpose of the artwork and the idea it wants the public to understand, the description helps transform the poster from a piece of art into a true public service campaign message.

#### **Possible themes to explore**

- The judiciary as guardian of constitutional rights
- Landmark moments where courts expanded or clarified freedoms
- The meaning of equality under the law
- The balance between individual liberty and societal responsibility
- The courtroom as a symbol of fairness, justice, and civic trust
- A vision of how the judiciary continues to shape the nation’s future

**DEADLINE: MARCH 27, 2026**

## Who May Enter

The contest is open to high school students (grades 9–12) enrolled in public, private, parochial, and charter schools and home-schooled students of equivalent grade status in the four states that comprise the Sixth Circuit (Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee). Children of federal judges, chambers staff, and employees of federal court offices are not eligible to participate.

### Graphic Poster, Description Length, Format, Submission, and Judging

Posters and description must be submitted via email as a PDF file to [CA06-Civics\\_Contest@ca6.uscourts.gov](mailto:CA06-Civics_Contest@ca6.uscourts.gov) by 11:59 PM on **Friday, March 27, 2026**.

#### Graphic Poster

Graphic artwork should be submitted electronically as PDF, maximum 10 MB.

#### Content Guidelines

- **Positive Messaging:** Must promote civic engagement, responsibility, or awareness. Must be consistent with desired theme.
- **Respectful Tone:** No offensive, discriminatory, or harmful content.
- **Accuracy:** Information presented must be factually correct.
- **Informative:** Must include one paragraph description on how it connects with theme.

#### Description

Description of the poster should be no more 500 words.

Please follow these formatting guidelines for description:

- Use 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced text, with one-inch margins
- Include a title page with your first and last name, school (if applicable), grade level, city and state, email, and phone
- Name your file: Firstname Lastname.docx (example: John Smith.docx)

Posters and descriptions will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Message Clarity (25%)** – Is the civic message clear and impactful?
- **Creativity (25%)** – Is the public service campaign original and engaging?
- **Relevance (25%)** – Does it connect to civic themes and responsibilities?
- **Technical Quality (25%)** – Is the production polished and easy to understand?

**The first-place winner will receive a \$1,000 award!**

## Helpful Resources

### Founding Documents & Historical Background

- **National Archives – Declaration of Independence** High-resolution images, transcripts, and historical context <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>
- **Library of Congress – Founding Era Collections** Manuscripts, letters, and early American documents <https://www.loc.gov/collections>
- **National Constitution Center – Interactive Constitution** Expert commentary on constitutional principles <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution>

### Understanding the Judiciary

- **U.S. Courts – Educational Resources** How federal courts work, plus civics materials <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources>
- **Federal Judicial Center – Court History & Biographies** Historical materials on the federal judiciary <https://www.fjc.gov/history>
- **Supreme Court Historical Society** Essays, case histories, and educational content <https://supremecourthistory.org>

### Landmark Cases & Civic Learning

- **Oyez (Cornell Law School)** Supreme Court case summaries and oral argument audio <https://www.oyez.org>
- **Annenberg Classroom** Videos and resources explaining constitutional rights <https://www.annenbergclassroom.org>

### Artistic & Cultural Inspiration

- **Smithsonian American Art Museum – American Identity Collections** Artworks exploring American themes and history <https://americanart.si.edu>
- **Library of Congress – Prints & Photographs Division** Historic imagery, political cartoons, and cultural artifacts <https://www.loc.gov/pictures>

### Accessible Civics Resources

- **iCivics** Games and lessons on courts and constitutional principles <https://www.icivics.org>
- **Judicial Learning Center** Simple explanations of the court system <https://judiciallearningcenter.org>

Questions may be sent to [Nikki\\_Lunkenheimer@ca6.uscourts.gov](mailto:Nikki_Lunkenheimer@ca6.uscourts.gov).