



THE CLEVELAND MOCK TRIAL COMPETITION

A PIPELINE PROGRAM THAT WILL CONTINUE TO PAY DIVIDENDS FOR YEARS TO COME

Patrick J. Krebs

For the past 24 years, the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (CMBA) has hosted the Cleveland Mock Trial Competition in conjunction with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the Cleveland Municipal Court. The Cleveland Mock Trial Competition gives Cleveland and East Cleveland high school students a chance to prepare their best legal arguments for an exciting day of competition with their peers each year in the spring. Coached by volunteer attorneys, judges, and law students, the teams take turns representing the prosecution and defense in a criminal appeal, giving them the opportunity both to hone their legal skills and to learn more about important issues facing teens today. The top attorneys, witness, and essay writer are rewarded with a paid summer internship at the Cleveland Municipal Court.

In years past, the topics for the Cleveland Mock Trial Competition have included the opioid crisis, police encounters, charges of hazing, driving while texting, bullying, misdemeanor child endangerment, and criminal stalking. Last year's case featured a hypothetical based on real historic events of great interest to Cleveland students: the trial of Fred Ahmed Evans in the wake of the shootout between political activists and police in the Glenville neighborhood. The case presented an ideal opportunity for learning about criminal procedure, witnesses and credibility, and interactions between the public and police, which continues to be a hot button issue today.

For many participants, the Cleveland Mock Trial Competition is their first introduction to the legal profession. As noted by past participant and current Case Western Reserve University

Law School 3L student Tiana Bohanon, "The only exposure I had to the legal field was from television shows such as Law & Order. Mock Trial allowed me to come face to face with the career I have always known I wanted to pursue. For me, Mock Trial was not just a competition in high school. Mock Trial was the most important building block that solidified my passion to pursue law and become a lawyer. Not only did Mock Trial introduce me to mentors and legal professionals, but it also ignited a fire in me that still burns today."

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has impacted almost every aspect of our daily lives, including causing major disruption to schools throughout the nation. Both Cleveland and East Cleveland schools announced temporary shut-downs in response to the virus. As a result, the CMBA, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and the Cleveland Municipal Court in March made the sad but necessary decision to cancel the 2020 Cleveland Mock Trial Competition on May 8th, which has been a highlight of Law Day celebrations each spring and a testament to the valued partnership between the CMBA, the schools, and the court.

Although the full Cleveland Mock Trial Competition has been cancelled, the CMBA will still hold the annual writing competition, which is open to all students in the Cleveland and East Cleveland high schools. The essays will be submitted and reviewed remotely, with the winners receiving a gift card prize. Like all of the CMBA's programs, the Cleveland Mock Trial Competition is made possible through the generous support of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Foundation's volunteers, donors, sponsors, and Fellows. We thank you for your past support and look forward to resuming the Cleveland Mock Trial Competition next year. It is a critical part of our pipeline programs, and it will continue to pay dividends for our region for years to come.

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