NATIONAL ANIMAL LAW COMPETITIONS

# APPELLATE ADVOCACY COMPETITION

# 2027 RULES

**PRESENTED BY:**

ANIMAL LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


**RULE I. ORGANIZATION** ..... 1

**RULE II. PARTICIPATION** ..... 1

*A. Competitor and Team Eligibility.* ..... 1

*B. Substitution.* ..... 1

*C. Registration.* ..... 2

**RULE III. COACHING** ..... 2

*A. Timing and Qualifying Round Assistance (VERY IMPORTANT!).* ..... 2

*B. Other Restrictions.* ..... 3

*C. During the Semi-final and Final Rounds.* ..... 4

*D. Communication with Judges.* ..... 4

**RULE IV. COMPETITION PROBLEM** ..... 5

*A. Distribution and Components.* ..... 5

*B. Questions and Competition Administrators.* ..... 5

**RULE V. THE BRIEFS** ..... 6

*A. General.* ..... 6

*B. Length and Form of Briefs.* ..... 6

*C. Submission of Brief and Certification.* ..... 9

**RULE VI. THE ORAL ARGUMENT** ..... 9

*A. General.* ..... 9

*B. Quarter-, Semi-Final, and Final Rounds.* ..... 10

*C. Order and Timing of the Oral Arguments.* ..... 10

**RULE VII. SCORING** ..... 11

*A. Qualifying Round.* ..... 11

*B. Quarter-Final Rounds.* ..... 12

*C. Semi-Final Rounds.* ..... 13

*D. Final Round.* ..... 13

*E. Results.* ..... 13

**RULE VIII. AWARDS** ..... 14

**RULE IX. PENALTIES** ..... 14

**RULE X. INTERPRETATION OF THE RULES** ..... 14

## RULE I. ORGANIZATION

The National Animal Law Competitions (NALC) is an inter-school event comprised of two distinct components for the 2026/2027 season:

- Appellate Advocacy Competition and
- Legislative Drafting & Lobbying Competition

NALC is an exciting educational event presented by the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), originally organized from 2004-2016 by Lewis & Clark Law School with support from ALDF and Harvard Law School, then subsequently revived in 2023 by the Brooks Institute for Animal Rights Law & Policy. The purpose of the event is to provide students with an opportunity to develop knowledge in the field of animal law and policy and to hone their written and oral advocacy skills.

## RULE II. PARTICIPATION

### *A. Competitor and Team Eligibility.*

The Appellate Advocacy Competition is open to all current full- or part-time J.D. students at ABA-approved law schools in the United States who have completed at least one year of their studies.* This competition is team-based, with each team composed of two (2) law students. The two (2) students need not be attending the same law school provided both currently attend an ABA-approved law school in the United States.

** First-year law students are eligible to compete in the Legislative Drafting & Lobbying components of the National Animal Law Competitions. First-year law students are not eligible to compete in the Appellate Advocacy component. Students enrolled in a master's or PhD program are eligible to compete only in the Legislative Drafting & Lobbying component of the Competitions.*

### *B. Substitution.*

In the event of an emergency, teams may send an alternate team member. The team must immediately notify the competition administrator of the change at events@aldf.org using the email subject line "NALC Appellate Argument Substitution."

### *C. Registration.*

**Registration for the 2027 National Animal Law Competitions will open on Tuesday, September 15, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET).**

**Registration will close promptly at 11:59 p.m. (ET) on Friday, November 6, 2026.**

To register, please visit **ALDF – National Animal Law Competitions**.

During registration, competitors must arrange payment of a $50 registration fee per team. Note that registration does not guarantee participation in the competition.

**The qualifying round written materials must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. (ET) on Tuesday, December 1, 2026, and will be judged electronically. On Tuesday, January 5, 2027, up to eight (8) teams with two (2) competitors each will be notified of their selection to compete in the quarter-final rounds, taking place via Zoom on Saturday, February 20, 2027. Semi-final rounds will happen the following day on Sunday, February 21, 2027.**

After the semi-finals conclude, two (2) teams with two (2) competitors each will be notified of their selection to compete in the final rounds on **Friday, March 12, 2027**, at the Portland Hilton Downtown in Portland, Oregon. The selected finalists will have their reasonable travel and accommodation expenses for the in-person competition in Portland, Oregon covered by the Animal Legal Defense Fund. More information about submitting your materials and the selection process for the qualifying, semi-final, and final rounds is provided below.

## RULE III. COACHING

### *A. Timing and Qualifying Round Assistance (VERY IMPORTANT!).*

**Do not risk disqualification!** Competitors are not allowed to receive ANY coaching or assistance with the problem prior to January 5, 2027.

This means that the written brief must be the sole work product of the competitors. As part of the registration process, all competitors must sign and submit the **Certification of**

**Authenticity form** attesting to the originality of their work product and consenting to having the final rounds video recorded.

Note that the use of AI large language models (such as ChatGPT) in preparing to write or writing any NALC submissions is prohibited. Any use of AI large language models will be considered as not the team's own work and that team will be subject to immediate disqualification. Please be aware that the competition administrators reserve the right to check individual Competition entries for the presence or use of ChatGPT or other generative AI outputs.

**As a reminder, registration is due no later than November 6, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. (ET). Failure to meet the registration deadline will result in disqualification from the competition.**

**In addition, competitors may not discuss the problem with anyone (other than their teammate), including professors, coaches, students, colleagues, or any other individuals prior to January 5, 2027, which is when the quarter-final round competitors will be announced and notified.**

After January 5, 2027, and through the end of the competition, the selected quarter-finalists and, later, finalists, may receive coaching assistance to prepare for the quarter-final, semi-final, and final appellate advocacy rounds pursuant to the additional restrictions outlined in these rules.

In sum, only after: 1) you have registered; 2) you have submitted your qualifying round brief; 3) the quarter-final round competitors have been notified on January 5, 2027; and 4) pursuant to the additional restrictions outlined in these rules, may competitors receive assistance from coaches in preparation for the semi-final and final appellate advocacy rounds.

**Violating any of these rules will result in automatic disqualification.**

### *B. Other Restrictions.*

Competitors also may not receive any coaching, advice, or assistance at any time from individuals who:

1. Served as lead author of the 2026/27 Appellate Advocacy Competition problem; or

2. Are serving as a judge for the 2026/27 Appellate Advocacy Competition.

The burden of determining coaching eligibility rests on the competitors. Therefore, before receiving any coaching, advice, or assistance from anyone, competitors first should inquire whether the person was lead author for the problem or if they will be serving as a judge for the 2026/27 Appellate Advocacy Competition. The competition judges will be finalized by January 5, 2027, which is the date competitors first may receive any assistance, advice, or coaching.

### *C. During the Semi-final and Final Rounds.*

Every effort is made to make NALC as fair as possible. Consequently, competitors and their coaches who are invited to compete via Zoom for the semi-final rounds may not observe any quarter or semi-final rounds other than those in which they or their team are participating. Final round competitors and their coaches may not observe any final round presentations other than those in which they or their team are participating. Competitors and their coaches who are not participating in the final round may observe the final round. Otherwise, all the final rounds will be open to the public. Recording of any sessions by any competitors, coaches, or the public is prohibited.

### *D. Communication with Judges.*

At all stages of the competition, competitors and coaches may not discuss the rules, problem, cases, strategy, or scoring with any NALC judges. Competitors and coaches also may not seek or receive any advice, feedback, or coaching from any NALC judges beyond the feedback that is provided immediately after each round. Likewise, competitors and coaches may not disclose to any NALC judges which school they represent until after the competition has concluded.

## RULE IV. COMPETITION PROBLEM

### *A. Distribution and Components.*

The Appellate Advocacy Competition problem is comprised of several documents. These include: four supporting affidavits, a Briefing Order, and a Memorandum Opinion. All these documents will be posted on the NALC website on **Tuesday, September 15, 2026**, by 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET). Please visit **ALDF – National Animal Law Competitions**.

**Qualifying Round**

For the qualifying round of the Appellate Advocacy Competition, competitors must draft a joint appellate brief that may not exceed thirty (30) pages in length. Teams are free to choose whether to write their brief for either the Petitioner or Respondents. All briefs are due as set forth in Rule V(C).

**Semi-Final and Final Rounds**

On January 5, 2027, up to eight (8) teams will be invited to participate in the quarter-final rounds via Zoom on **Saturday, February 20, 2027**. Four (4) teams then will be selected to participate in the semi-final rounds on **Sunday, February 21, 2027** via Zoom. Two (2) finalist teams then will be selected to compete in the final round, which will be held in-person on **Friday, March 12, 2027**, during the Student Convention at the Portland Hilton Downtown in Portland, Oregon. See Rule VI(B) for the format and timing of the oral arguments.

**The written and oral components are both crucial aspects of the Appellate Advocacy Competition. Therefore, competitors should strive for the very best work product possible.**

### *B. Questions and Competition Administrators.*

If you have any questions about the Appellate Advocacy Competition problem, requirements, or rules, please contact the competition administrators at events@aldf.org at the earliest date possible using the subject line "NALC Question." Be sure to read both

the problem and the rules in their entirety before requesting clarification. Also be sure to refer to the rules again prior to the semi-final and final competition rounds. The competition administrators will not be able to respond to questions that already are answered in the rules and, if needed, can provide only minimal clarification on the problem.

## RULE V. THE BRIEFS

### *A. General.*

Competitors are instructed to draft and submit a brief as outlined in the Briefing Order portion of the Appellate Advocacy Competition problem. The written brief is a crucial aspect of the Competition that constitutes 100% of the qualifying round score and serves as the determining factor in the event of a tie in the semi-final and final rounds. See Rule VI. Note that a special award for Best Brief will be given at the awards ceremony, which will be held at the conclusion of the National Animal Law Competitions on Friday, March 12, 2027.

Each team will write only one brief, which must be written by those arguing the problem. Teams are free to choose whether to write for the Appellant or Appellee (as identified by the court in the Briefing Order instructions) but will argue both sides of the problem during the semi-final rounds. See Rule VI(C). The submission of work produced by any person other than a teammate in preparing the brief is strictly prohibited, and competitors may not receive assistance from anyone prior to January 5, 2027. The use of AI large language models in preparing or writing the brief also is prohibited; see Rule III(A) for the full restriction and its consequences.

### *B. Length and Form of Briefs.*

**1. Content of Briefs.** Briefs must contain, under appropriate headings, and in the order indicated:

a. a table of contents – with page references;

b. a table of authorities – cases (alphabetically arranged), statutes, and other authorities – with references to the pages of the brief where they are cited;

c. a statement of the issues presented for review;

d. a statement of the case briefly indicating the nature of the case, the course of proceedings, and the disposition below;

e. a statement of facts relevant to the issues submitted for review;

f. a summary of the argument – which must contain a succinct and accurate statement of the arguments made in the body of the brief, and which must not merely repeat the argument headings;

g. the argument – which must contain:

i. the parties' contentions and the reasons for them, including any public policy considerations, with citations to the authorities and to the parts of the record relied upon; and

ii. for each issue, a concise statement of the applicable standard of review (which may appear in the discussion of the issue or under a separate heading placed before the discussion of the issues); and

h. a short conclusion stating the precise relief sought.

**2. Form of Brief.**

**a. Cover. The cover of the Petitioner's brief must use blue text; the Respondents' brief must use red text.** The front cover of the briefs must contain:

i. the number of the case centered at the top;

ii. the name of the court;

iii. the title of the case;

iv. the nature of the proceeding (e.g., Appeal, Petition for Review) and the name of the court, agency, or board below;

v. the title of the brief, identifying the party or parties for whom the brief is filed; and

vi. the individual team number assigned when you registered. To preserve anonymity, include only your team number. Do not include any information that would identify your name or school.

**b. Layout and Line Spacing.** The brief must be formatted for 8½ by 11-inch paper. The text must be double-spaced, except that quotations more than fifty words long may be indented and single-spaced, and headings and footnotes may be single-spaced. Margins must be at least one inch on all four sides. Page numbers may be placed in the margins, but no text may appear there.

**c. Type Styles.** The brief must be set in plain, 12-point Times New Roman font with footnotes in 11-point Times New Roman font; italics or boldface may be used for emphasis. Case names must be italicized or underlined.

**d. Length.** The total length of the brief, excluding the Cover, Table of Contents, Table of Authorities, and any Appendices, may not exceed thirty (30) pages.

**e. Citations.** All citations shall be contained within the text, not in footnotes. Any footnotes (for explanatory information only) shall be in 11-point Times New Roman font, single-spaced. All citations shall be in the form prescribed by the latest edition of The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation (Bluebook).

**f. Citation Permitted.** The briefs may cite judicial opinions, orders, judgments, or other written dispositions that have been designated as "unpublished," "not for publication," "non-precedential," "not precedent," or the like.

**g. Unpublished Law Review or Other Articles.** Law review or other articles unpublished at the time a brief is filed may not be cited.

**h. Appendices.** Appendices may be used to recite the text of statutes, constitutional provisions, regulations, and other permitted materials that are not generally available.

**3. Number of Briefs.** Each team must submit a total of one (1) electronic copy of its brief. The electronic copy must be prepared according to the specifications provided herein. No hard copies of the brief shall be submitted.

**4. Certification.** Each team must certify that its brief was prepared in accordance with these rules and that the work product is solely that of the team members. The **Certification of Authenticity** online form must be completed by each individual and submitted prior to the brief due date.

### *C. Submission of Brief and Certification.*

**1. Submission to the Competition Administrator. By 11:59 p.m. (ET) on Tuesday, December 1, 2026, the following materials are due: (a) each team must submit an electronic copy of their brief to events@aldf.org; and (b) the online Certification of Authenticity form must be completed by each individual (submission link to be shared with participants by the competition administrator). To avoid disqualification, the competition administrator must receive both by this deadline.**

**2. Revision of Briefs.**

Briefs may not be revised after submission.

## RULE VI. THE ORAL ARGUMENT

### *A. General.*

The oral argument is a crucial aspect of the Appellate Advocacy Competition. It constitutes 100% of the score in the semi-final and final rounds (with the brief score serving as the determining factor in the event of a tie). Note that a special award for Best Oral Advocate also will be given at the awards ceremony, which will be held at the conclusion of the National Animal Law Competitions on **Friday, March 12, 2027**.

### *B. Quarter-, Semi-Final, and Final Rounds.*

Up to eight (8) teams will be selected to compete in the quarter-final rounds via Zoom on **Saturday, February 20, 2027**, where they will present their thirty (30) minute oral argument to a panel of competition judges. Competitors will be informed that evening if they have advanced to the semi-final rounds.

Each team will compete in two (2) quarter-final rounds that will take place on **Saturday, February 20, 2027**, via Zoom. For the first quarter-final rounds, the competition administrators will randomly assign which teams will argue for the Petitioner and which teams will argue for the Respondents. Each team then will argue for the other side in their second quarter-final round. All teams will receive comments and feedback from judges at the close of each round. Teams may not witness the rounds of other competitors until the final round, which will be open to competitors, coaches, and the public.

Four (4) teams will progress to the semi-final round, which will take place on **Sunday, February 21, 2027,** via Zoom. For the semi-final rounds, the competition administrators randomly will assign which teams will argue for the Petitioner and which teams will argue for the Respondents.

Two (2) teams then will progress to the final round, which will take place in person on **Friday, March 12, 2027**, during the Student Convention in Portland, Oregon (see Rule VII for scoring rules). For the final round, the competition administrators randomly will assign which team will argue for the Petitioner and which team will argue for the Respondents.

### *C. Order and Timing of the Oral Arguments.*

**1. Time Allowed for Arguments.**

Oral argument will be limited to a total of thirty (30) minutes per team, fifteen (15) minutes for each team member, except as discussed below. Judges, at their discretion, may interrupt arguments to ask questions but may not allow additional time, except that judges may allow a few seconds at the end of an argument to finish answering a question and/or

to briefly conclude. If allowed to conclude after time has expired, competitors must finish within ten (10) seconds.

Petitioner argues first, then Respondents. Petitioner may reserve up to five (5) minutes of the allotted thirty (30) minutes for rebuttal. Only one team member may speak during the rebuttal. Rebuttal time may be subtracted from one or both team members' time allotment as requested prior to the argument. The team does not need to designate in advance which team member will speak during the rebuttal.

At the commencement of each round, the competitors will be allowed a few moments to prepare. Competitors will relay whether they would like all available time warnings (seven (7), five (5), and three (3) minute marks), or fewer. When everyone is ready, the bailiff or timekeeper will announce that the first party may begin.

The bailiff or timekeeper will display a green card until only one (1) minute remains of the competitor's allotted time. Additional signals can be given as requested by the competitor at the start, at the seven (7), five (5), and three (3) minute marks. When one (1) minute remains, a yellow card will be displayed. When the competitor's time has expired, a red card will be displayed, signaling that the competitor must conclude promptly.

**2. Notification of Party Assignments.** As described in Rule VI(B), which side each team argues is assigned randomly. Quarter-final and semi-final teams will be notified of their assignment and schedule on **January 5, 2027**, when the quarter-finalists are announced. Final round teams will be notified of their assignment on **Sunday, February 21, 2027** following the conclusion of the semi-final rounds.

## RULE VII. SCORING

### *A. Qualifying Round.*

A committee of experienced attorneys, and/or law professors will score all the submitted briefs. Based on those brief scores, up to eight (8) qualifying round teams will be selected

to participate virtually in the Appellate Advocacy Competition quarter-final round via Zoom on **Saturday, February 20, 2027**.

**Written Brief:**

A well-written, well-researched brief is crucial to the Appellate Advocacy Competition. See Rule V(A). Total brief scores will be calculated by the average score of the panel of graders who are reading for content, thoroughness of research, depth of analysis, persuasiveness of argument, clarity of writing, inclusion of public policy, grammar, format, correct Bluebook citation, spelling, syntax, punctuation, capitalization, length, proper certification, ability to follow instructions, etc.

The panel will determine the overall best brief, earning its authors the Best Brief award, which will be announced at the awards ceremony held at the conclusion of the National Animal Law Competitions on Friday, March 12, 2027.

### *B. Quarter-Final Rounds.*

A panel of up to three (3) judges will view and score the quarter-final round oral arguments. The judges will consider a variety of factors including organization, preparation, courtroom presentation, handling of questions, and legal reasoning. Each of the quarter-final round teams will compete in two rounds and will receive comments and feedback from the judges at the close of each round. The score for each team in a particular quarter-final round is the total of the scores given to each team member by the judges of that round. Each judge also will note in their scoring which of the two teams "won" each quarter-final round argument.

At the conclusion of the two quarter-final rounds, a total score for each team will be calculated as follows:

50% – score from the first quarter-final round

50% – score from the second quarter-final round

The four (4) teams with the highest total scores then will advance to the semi-final round. In the event of a tie, the team with the greater number of “wins” from the judges in the two semi-final rounds will advance. Any persisting tie will be decided by the teams' brief scores.

### *C. Semi-Final Rounds.*

A panel of up to three (3) judges will view and score the semi-final round oral arguments. The judges will consider a variety of factors including organization, preparation, courtroom presentation, handling of questions, and legal reasoning. Each of the semi-final round teams will compete in one round and will receive comments and feedback from the judges at the close of that round. The score for each team in the semi-final round is the total of the scores given to each team member by the judges of that round. Each judge also will note in their scoring which of the two teams “won” each semi-final round argument.

The two (2) teams with the highest total scores then will advance to the final round. In the event of a tie, the team with the greater number of “wins” from the judges in the quarter-final and semi-final rounds will advance. Any persisting tie will be decided by the teams' brief scores.

### *D. Final Round.*

A panel of up to three (3) in-person judges will view and score the final round oral arguments. The judges again will consider a variety of factors including organization, preparation, courtroom presentation, handling of questions, and legal reasoning. The final round winners will be determined solely by the scores each team receives in the final round. Scores from the briefs, qualifying round, and semi-final rounds are not included in this determination, except in the event of a tie which will be decided by the teams' brief scores.

### *E. Results.*

Teams will receive oral feedback at the end of each quarter-final, semi-final, and final round. The two (2) semi-finalist teams advancing to the final round will be announced on

Sunday, February 21, 2027, and be notified at that time which side they will represent. Winners of the competition will be announced during the awards ceremony following the final round on Friday, March 12, 2027.

## RULE VIII. AWARDS

Awards will be given at the awards ceremony which will be held at the conclusion of the National Animal Law Competitions on Friday, March 12, 2027. The winning team of the Appellate Advocacy Competition will receive two individual plaques, as well as a plaque for display by their law school. The Runner-Up team will receive two individual plaques. The remaining semi-finalist teams will receive individual certificates.

Awards also will be given for the Best Oral Advocate and to the team with the Best Brief who may not necessarily be competition finalists.

The competitors' names and photos may be posted on the Animal Legal Defense Fund's websites/platforms, along with video recordings of the final round competition.

## RULE IX. PENALTIES

Penalties, including disqualification, may be assessed at the discretion of the administrators for failure to comply with any rule or deadline set pursuant to these rules.

## RULE X. INTERPRETATION OF THE RULES

Requests for interpretation of these rules should be made to the competition administrator at events@aldf.org at the earliest date possible using the email subject line “NALC Rules Question.” All competitors will receive prompt notification of any new rules, as well as revisions to or interpretations of existing rules. All competitors shall be bound by any changes effective at the time of notification.

**The Animal Legal Defense Fund wishes you an exciting and productive 2026/27 Appellate Advocacy Competition. Best of luck to all competitors!**