



NYSBA News Release

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GOSHEN CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL WINS NEW YORK STATE HIGH SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL TOURNAMENT

In an intense competition before a packed courtroom in the James T. Foley Federal Courthouse in downtown Albany, students from Goshen Central High School, Orange County, edged out the team from Brooklyn Technical High School, Kings County, to win the 2017-2018 New York State High School Mock Trial Tournament. It was Goshen High School's fourth year in the semi-finals, and its first time in the finals.

Over the course of the two-day tournament, eight teams, representing the eight regional winners from throughout the state, argued the fictional criminal case of *People v. Carson Conners*. Conners, an at-risk student at Bigtown High School, reportedly pushed another student, loudly refused to go to the Assistant Principal's office when told to do so, and was subsequently arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.

Conners was suspended from school but rather than settle the case, chose to go to trial. The defense believes that the school's disciplinary policy amounts to a "school to prison pipeline" that targets disruptive students by criminalizing even minor infractions, in this case to keep Conners from participating in an upcoming high-stakes districtwide assessment test.

Hon. Mae D'Agostino, US District Judge for the Northern District of New York, presided over the final round of competition on Tuesday, May 15. Before announcing the winner, D'Agostino spoke of the difficulty in deciding the outcome, saying that mere "millimeters" separated the two teams. She told the six student-attorneys in the final round that "any one of you today could walk into a courtroom downstairs and get to work." Then D'Agostino said, "Know that you were extraordinary in every way."

The six other semifinalists were teams from Clarence High School, Erie County; Fayetteville-Manlius High School, Onondaga County; Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons High School, Schenectady County; Hunter College High School, New York County; Massapequa High School, Nassau County; and Huntington High School, Suffolk County. Altogether, about 150 students participated in Monday's semi-finals, with the two winners facing each other on Tuesday morning.

New York State Bar Association President Sharon Stern Gerstman attended Monday evening's dinner after the semi-finals and spoke about her experience as an attorney-coach, coordinator of the Buffalo competition and mock trial judge. She told the audience that many of the students she coached "were so

good, I remember thinking they were better than some of the lawyers I saw at the courthouse, where I worked.”

Acting Supreme Court Justice Gerald Lebovits, a judge in Monday’s semi-finals, praised the students’ seriousness and their “high level of skill and professionalism, on par with many lawyers.” Each team came, he said, with a cadre of volunteers – parents, teachers, coaches and attorneys – noting the striking level of community support.

The members of Goshen’s winning team were Fattum Abbad, Nazya Ahmed, Jessica Bailey, Rachel Blustein, Arrington Brendle, Kareena Chhabra, Zachary Constantine, Giannamarie Diaz, Michael Ehling, Liam Higgins, Sara Higgins, Caitlin Hough, Aleena Jacob, Sydney Jessup, Jay Jung, Olivia Klugman, Ava Kunis, Magdalen Larsen, James Lindeman, Anya Malhotra, Domenico Pasquini, Ashley Rivera, Robbie Siracuse and Robert Winslow. The team’s attorney coach was Mark Stern and the faculty coach was Robert Karshawer.

The mock trial case and accompanying materials are developed over the summer, and the Mock Trial County Coordinators distribute the case packets in November. Four hundred high schools, 4,000 students and their teacher-coaches and 1,500 volunteer lawyers participated in the 2017–2018 tournament and hundreds of judges volunteered their time. County bars help recruit volunteers and local bar foundations lend support.

The New York State High School Mock Trial Tournament – one of the largest in the country – has been administered by the Law, Youth and Citizenship Committee of the New York State Bar Association since 1982. It is supported by The New York Bar Foundation.

About the New York State Bar Association

The New York State Bar Association is the largest voluntary state bar association in the nation. Since 1876, the Association has helped shape the development of law, educated and informed the legal profession and the public, and championed the rights of New Yorkers through advocacy and guidance in our communities.