Harassment & Discrimination Policy

Our commitment to a respectful, safe tournament for every student, judge, coach and volunteer.

Applies at all WASDL tournaments

Our commitment

The Washington Area Speech and Debate League (WASDL) is committed to providing participants, judges, coaches and volunteers the opportunity to pursue excellence in their endeavors. This opportunity can exist only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect.

WASDL prohibits all forms of harassment and discrimination. Accordingly, all forms of harassment and discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by any applicable federal, state or local law are prohibited, whether committed by participants, judges, coaches, volunteers and/or observers.

WASDL reserves all rights to subject violators to the full range of sanctions, up to and including removal from the tournament premises and referral to appropriate authorities.

Reporting harassment or discrimination

Any individual or group of individuals who believe they have been a victim of harassment and/or discrimination should report it to the Tab room or a tournament official immediately.

Any tournament participant, including students, coaches, judges and observers, who believes they have been the subject of harassment and/or discrimination in violation of this policy is encouraged to report the alleged violation to tournament officials in the Tab room.

Open-door policy at WASDL tournaments

WASDL is committed to providing safe performance spaces for all competitors and judges. We acknowledge that the art of advocacy through performance and debate may be a healing process and/or an opportunity to speak on important topics. It is impossible to know all the ways in which the content of a performance or debate may unintentionally harm or trigger members of the audience. To better serve our competitors, we honor an open-door practice during all rounds.

The open-door policy means competitors and other audience members may choose to leave or stay in a room when a performance negatively impacts their well-being. Competitors may discreetly leave the room (for example, before, during or after someone's performance) without question or penalty. Judges may also take steps to protect their well-being by contacting the Tab room or a tournament official before or after a performance.

We recognize that putting mental and physical well-being above community norms is imperfect but important work.

A note on content warnings

Over the last few years, there have been many important and necessary conversations in our activity about the role content warnings (sometimes called “trigger warnings”) should play in the speech and debate space. These conversations are still ongoing as the community works toward developing norms, standards and best practices to make speech and debate the most educational, productive and safe space it can be for all members of our community.

At this time, WASDL does not have any policy mandating content warnings in any of our events.

That said, we recognize that words are powerful and can affect our audience in ways we do, and sometimes do not, intend. If competitors would like to give content warnings, that is permitted and encouraged as a thoughtful good practice.

As a best practice, content warnings should:

- Be relatively short (one or two sentences) and identify the potentially sensitive content appropriately.
- In debate, come before the speech begins, as part of any off-time roadmap.
- In speech, come at the start of the performance. Content warnings in speech count as part of the timed performance.
- Be delivered much like the TV Parental Guidelines shown before a show on network TV. For example: “Today’s presentation involves discussion of gun violence in schools and coarse language.” The intent is to allow audience members who cannot listen to these topics for their own personal reasons to remove themselves, as appropriate, before the presentation begins.

If there is a concern about the content of a speech, please refer to the open-door policy above or contact the Tab room or a tournament official.