



# 2025-2026 Mary Ellen Van Dyke Voices for Life Oratory Scholarship Guidelines (9-12 grade)

**Statement of Purpose:** The Right to Life of Southwest Indiana Mary Ellen Van Dyke Oratory Scholarship strives to promote the ability of high school students to share their pro-life views with others. This scholarship is named after Mary Ellen Van Dyke, a pro-life advocate who accomplished much in the local pro-life movement. This year's theme for the Oratory Scholarship is **"The Pro-Life Generation."**

This scholarship seeks to help teens organize and express their views via a written/speaking contest. Eligible students will write a 5-7 minute pro-life speech and record a video of the speech to submit to the contest. A panel of pro-life judges will evaluate all submissions, and the contestants with the top three scores will be contacted to present their speech at the final competition on April 9, 2026.

***To ensure fairness and avoid conflicts of interest, any individual who is a current or former employee of Right to Life of Southwest Indiana is not eligible to have their children, siblings, or family members participate in the Art, Essay, and Oratory Contest.***

**All individuals will be contacted no later than Thursday, April 2, 2026, regarding whether they have or have not moved on to the final competition date.**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner of the RTLWIN contest will advance and present his/her speech at the Indiana Right to Life State Contest (Winner will receive this information from RTLWIN once it is released). The IRL State Contest will be held on April 17; however, it is not an in-person event. Participants will submit a video submission. If a student wins the Indiana Right to Life State Contest, that student will advance to the National Right to Life Contest.

\*Students in grades 9-10 are not eligible to advance to the Indiana RTL State Contest per the state contest rules and guidelines; students must be in grades 11-12 to be eligible to compete in the state contest. If a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade student wins first place in the RTLWIN contest, then the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade student with the highest score will have the opportunity to participate in the Indiana RTL State Contest.

## **Scholarships:**

- *1<sup>st</sup> Place: \$1000*
- *2<sup>nd</sup> Place: \$500*
- *3<sup>rd</sup> Place: \$250*

## **2025-2026 Guidelines:**

*Students participating in the 2025-2026 Mary Ellen Van Dyke Voices for Life Oratory Scholarship must adhere to the guidelines established below.*

### **Eligibility**

- The Oratory Scholarship Contest is open to all students enrolled in grades 9-12 as of February 2, 2026. In the case of advanced students, non-traditional students, or home-schooled students, eligibility is determined by the

year the students will enter college. Students from Spencer, Posey, Gibson, Warrick, and Vanderburgh counties may enter.

- Students who competed during their freshman, sophomore, or junior year may compete the following year (with an entirely new speech), as may winners of previous contests if they meet the grade requirement. There is one exception to this rule: a student who has won the National Right to Life contest may not compete again.
- Applicants must complete an online registration form by February 26, 2026. The form can be found on our website.
- Contestants are to research, write, and present an original pro-life speech. The following issues can be addressed:
  - Abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, or stem cell research
- All claims must be substantiated with current documentation that is referenced in the text.
- No copyrighted or AI-generated speeches shall be used in the contest.
- Videos must be submitted no later than March 5, 2026, by 4 pm.

#### ***Video Presentation of Speech/Video Speech Evaluation***

- The speech will be submitted through video format. All oratory video entries will be submitted by Dropbox, [CLICK HERE](#) for dropbox link.
- When submitting your speech video, save it using this protocol: 2026-speech title.pdf.
- For example, if your essay is titled “The Importance of Life,” your submission would be saved as follows: 2026-TheImportanceofLife.pdf.
- The video environment must be professional, sound quality must be audible, and video quality must be clear.
- We ask all individuals to dress appropriately and professionally while filming their speech.
- Appropriate gestures are allowed.
- Props are not allowed.
- Contestants may use note cards when filming the speech, but they should not read the notes verbatim.
- The speech is to be 5-7 minutes in length.
  - A contestant will be disqualified if the speech is less than 4 minutes or over 8 minutes in length.
  - Judges are instructed to use their discretion regarding the scoring of speeches in the 4-5 minute and 7-8 minute time frame.
- Speech content may NOT be significantly changed if a contestant advances to the final speech presentation.
- The style of speech type should be appropriate to the speech’s message. Emotion may be used to convey a message, but a dramatic presentation is not acceptable.
  - A dramatic presentation is considered anything read or performed that has been previously written by another author, including a short story, poem, etc. Although quotes to support a position or statement are appropriate, they may not dominate the speech and should be appropriately cited.

- Dramatic presentations are also defined, for the purposes of this contest, to include acting as a thing or another person, such as acting out the life of an unborn baby.

### ***Final Speech Presentation***

The top three contestants will be contacted to present their speech in a final competition on April 9, 2026.

Competition Location: Fifth Third Bank Building, 20 NW Third Street, Evansville, IN, 47708.

Directions: Upon arrival, take the elevator to the fifth floor, and someone will meet you there. Once all three finalists arrive, we will conduct a random drawing to determine the order of presentations. Once this is decided, everyone will share their 5-7 minute speech to judges provided by Right to Life of Southwest Indiana.

Contestants competing in the final speech presentation will need to uphold the Video Presentation guidelines when it comes to dress, professionalism, and speech information. Winners of the final contest will be announced that evening once all judges' final decisions have been made.

### ***Final Speech Evaluation***

- Speaking order for the contest will be determined before the contest by drawing.
- The contest will have three judges and one timekeeper.
- All judges are pro-life. Since the judges' backgrounds and qualifications differ, the speech should appeal to a broad audience.
- The judges will score contestants in four areas: introduction, content, presentation, and conclusion. Contestants are given a score of 1-10 in each area (10 being the best). The scores are then added together for a perfect score of 40. The total scores from all three judges are added together to achieve a grand total. The grand total will determine which contestants will be named for first, second, and third places.
- The judges' decisions will be FINAL.
- All efforts will be made to ensure accuracy. In the event of a mistake, every effort will be made to correct it.
- In the event of a tie for first, each contestant may be asked to present his/her speech a second time.
- The decision of the Contest Director concerning the application of these rules is FINAL.
- The contest may be videotaped or recorded.
- In the final speech presentation, contestants may use note cards but should not read the speech verbatim.
- The use of microphones will not be allowed. The Contest Director may make an exception if the contest room creates the necessity for the use of microphones.
- Students may only enter ONE submission in ONE contest of their choosing. Students may not enter multiple entries in multiple contests. Students will choose whether to enter one piece into the Art Scholarship Contest, Mary Ellen Van Dyke Voices for Life Scholarship Contest, or Essay Scholarship Contest.

*These rules apply only to the Right to Life of Southwest Indiana Mary Ellen Van Dyke Voices for Life Oratory Scholarship. No other rules from any national or state speech group apply.*

***The top three finalists must attend the contest on Thursday, April 9, 2026, beginning at 3:30 pm at the Fifth Third Bank Building in downtown Evansville: 20 NW Third Street, Suite 810, Evansville, IN 47708.***

The winners will be contacted no later than Friday, April 10.

Applicants will receive specific information after submitting an application.

For more information, reach out to [adardeen@rtlswin.org](mailto:adardeen@rtlswin.org) or call 812-474-3195. Thank you for supporting life. We look forward to receiving your speech!