

# Students debate privacy, safety of police body cams



BUY PHOTO

Makeeda Bandele-Asante, right, a New London High School student, cross-examines Renelson Michel, left, in a debate in the Dr. Grace Sawyer Jones New London invitational on Friday, Dec. 2, 2016. (Nate Lynch/The Day)

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New London — "I believe there are three sides to every story," said May Courtney, a student at the Marine Science Magnet High School in Groton, to an audience of debate judges, parents and fellow students. "There's yours, there's mine, and there's the truth."

However, little ground was ceded between opposing teams in debates over police body cameras Friday afternoon at New London High School. Students asked their competitors tough questions, cut each other off with dismissive thank-yous and argued their well-researched facts.

The event was part of the second annual Dr. Grace Sawyer Jones high school debates — established for its namesake, a former president of Three Rivers College.

Teams from Three Rivers Middle College in Norwich, the Marine Science Magnet High School and New London High School competed for a chance to advance to a semi-final competition, and possibly on to finals in February.

The topic this year was a resolution that all police officers should wear body cameras.

Teams were given the topic in advance, along with a list of sources from which to prepare arguments. Right before the debate, teams found out whether they would argue in favor or against the resolution.

The idea sprang from an event in 2013, when Sawyer Jones arranged a Lincoln-Douglas debate at Three Rivers College to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Organizers became interested in doing a simpler debate for high school students, and last year established the parliamentary-style debates, which involve three to four members on each team and a series of speeches constructing an argument and then rebutting the rival's argument.

Courtney, delivering a rebuttal in her team's debate, spoke about the difficulty of determining what happens when a police officer gets into an altercation with a civilian, and the benefit more evidence would have for the judicial system.

The opposing team from Three Rivers Middle College pressed her team on the cost of body cameras, their unreliability and privacy issues, but were unable to unseat the team from the Marine Science Magnet High School, which went on to win first place in that debate.

The judging was done by State Rep.-elect Chris Soto of the 39th district, New London Police Capt. Brian Wright and Dr. Sue Iwanicki, principal of the Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London.

"Over 1,200 people were killed in encounters with police," Lily Simon of the Marine Science Magnet School said during her team's debate, "and I believe this is a problem."

In another debate, the team arguing against the resolution — made up of Renelson Michel, Pedro Camacho-Leon, Kayla Pecora and Thairis Melendez-Ortiz from New London — pressed Renel Michel, also of New London, of the team arguing for the cameras, about the cost.

But Renel Michel, competing with fellow New London teammates Zara Dobson and Makeeda Bandele-Asante, quickly retorted: "Money shouldn't be what makes the decision, people's lives should be."

The New London High School team debating against the resolution went on to prevail and take second, with its opposing team from New London and the team from Three Rivers Middle College coming in third and fourth, respectively.

In the advanced debates, the team from Three Rivers Middle College took first place, with the team from the Marine Science Magnet High School taking second.

The debate committee's goal, said Chairwoman Shiela Hayes, is to bring it to eight high schools in the area and establish a debate culture in southeastern Connecticut. Currently, they have six high schools and have divided themselves into a northern and southern region.

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