



HAWAII

STATE FOUNDATION on
CULTURE and the ARTS

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**TESTIMONY OF
THE STATE FOUNDATION ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS
TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE CULTURE, ARTS, & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
Wednesday, March 23, 2022/Conference Rm 329 via Videoconference
10:40am
H.C.R. 162/H.R. 162**

Chair Gates and members of the Committee, I am Jonathan Johnson, Executive Director of the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA), and we are grateful for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of H.C.R. 162.

The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts supports a collaborative effort between the Hawaii Council for the Humanities, State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, and Hawaii State Public Library System, for the establishment of a Hawaii State Poet Laureate Program.

Storytelling is a rich cultural tradition built into our every day lives in Hawai`i. A Poet Laureate would contribute to Hawaii's vibrant, multicultural creative community through the power of writing, reading and the spoken word.

Funding for the Hawaii State Poet Laureate Program would be provided and administered by the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts through a competitive grant process.

In an effort to foster the breadth of Hawaii's artistic genres, media and practitioners, the SFCA supports collaborations with public and private entities to bring diverse arts experiences to Hawaii's communities such as this.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this matter.



3599 Wai'ālae Ave., Ste. 25 • Honolulu, HI 96816 • Phone (808) 732-5402 • Fax (808) 732 5432 • hihumanities.org

Rep. Cedric Asuega Gates, Chair
Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Vice Chair
Committee on Culture, Arts, & International Affairs

March 22, 2022

Dear Representative Gates, Representative Tam, and the members of the House Committee on Culture, Arts, and International Affairs,

My name is Aiko Yamashiro, and I am the executive director of Hawai'i Council for the Humanities. I am writing in strong support of HCR 162, REQUESTING THE HAWAII COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES, STATE FOUNDATION ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS, AND THE HAWAII STATE PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM TO COLLABORATE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HAWAII STATE POET LAUREATE PROGRAM.

Hawai'i Council for the Humanities is a private nonprofit organization and state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Our mission is to connect people with ideas that enrich lives, broaden perspectives, and strengthen communities—all through the humanities (literature, history, philosophy, culture, etc.). Working on a statewide Poet Laureate program would fall squarely within our organizational mission and expertise. Many other state humanities councils (our counterparts) help to administer a poet laureate program in their state. Working with strong partners like the Hawai'i State Public Library System and the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts would help ensure community poetry workshops and events would be held in accessible public venues, and would reach across our different islands, rural and urban communities, across generations and ethnic groups.

When I was a PhD student at UH Mānoa, my research focused on the contemporary history of local literature in Hawai'i, and the power of poetry to strengthen communities. In that research, I learned about many inspiring examples of how poetry can bring heart and soul to all sectors of society. Poetry for elementary school students can help them develop a love of writing, and let adults feel the wonder and creativity of a child's perspective. Poetry for those with Alzheimer's can bring peace and respite, bringing moments of remembering old songs and rhymes, and the enjoyment of rhythm. Poetry for veterans can help people process difficult and hard-to-understand experiences, and let them be shared instead of held alone. Poetry in families can commemorate and honor really important life events—birthdays, funerals, graduations, weddings. Place-based poetry can instill pride and connection to place, and encourage people to learn more about the songs and poems of their communities.

Culture-based poetry can also instill pride and connection, or re-connection, and in diverse cultural spaces, poetry is a way to communicate across differences, to speak and be heard.

In Spring 2021, Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities was part of a national civic engagement initiative called “Why It Matters.” The purpose of this initiative was to create programs that strengthen civic voice and participation. As part of this project, we ran 8 virtual community poetry workshops, led by diverse local poets from O‘ahu, Maui, Guåhan (Guam), and Pohnpei. Our participants ranged from high-school age to 92 years old, from many cultural backgrounds and life experiences. We looked at many topics together: “superpowers” to gift to our communities, lessons from ‘āina, building the beloved community, historical newspapers and documents, and hard conversations about racism. I was blown away by the feeling of civic engagement in these poetry workshop spaces. Civic engagement felt like exploring your own voice, memories, and gifts. It felt like being brave and honest—saying words you really mean to other people. It also felt like listening wholeheartedly to others. The more voices shared, the more diverse the stories become. Courage and compassion created courage and compassion. This is how a group of people moves from an “I” to a “we” who feels connection and care for each other.

Here are some feedback from our poetry workshop events:

- “I was able to channel my emotions in a creative and productive way that hadn't felt accessible to me before.”
- “I loved learning how building the beloved community ties into all life - especially our civic lives. This workshop really gave me lots of skills for connecting creatively and meaningfully to community. More workshops like this, please!!”
- “Loved the guidance provided and all the poetry shared. I would never have been so brave to share if other brave people didn't go before me. Grateful for this time to share my heart.”

Poetry has a unique contribution to make to our society—strengthening civic voice, empathy, and understanding, expanding our hearts. A State Poet Laureate Program would encourage and value poetry in our many communities, and help to make poetry feel like it truly belongs to everyone as a powerful mode of expression, connection, and enriching way of life.

Thank you for considering this testimony, and I am happy to answer any further questions you may have.



Aiko Yamashiro
Executive Director, Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 9:43:11 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Travis	Pacific Tongues	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe the poet loria program should be funded with public money with public money in order to promote literacy and when literacy awareness education in Hawaii.. Hawaii is a unique one of a kind place in the world, Because of the Hawaiian people and their culture which was an oral culture which used oral traditions tor traditions to retain all knowledge in history to tell stories to dancula to chant. In the spirit of that tradition I believe it only makes sense for there to be a poet laureate of a place Where poetry was the primary vessel for all information knowledge and cultural history. Therefore it is with utmost pleasure that I express my unwaivering support for HCR162.

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/19/2022 3:35:04 PM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shawna Yang Ryan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I submit this testimony in favor of HCR162 as a writer and as Director of the Creative Writing Program at UH Mānoa. Hawai‘i has a rich and beautiful literary community—wonderful, moving, original testimonies of life in Hawai‘i are being written and performed by its participants. A Poet Laureate would allow the public to acknowledge and celebrate this community, and the poetry of Hawai‘i—thus it would also be a celebration of Hawai‘i itself. As an educator, I also understand that establishing this position would signal to young people that words are valued by our community. Poetry allows us to build bridges and foster empathy—only connection can come out of poetry. Please allow this vision of a Poet Laurate to materialize into reality.

Me ka mahalo nui,

Shawna Yang Ryan

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/19/2022 3:54:39 PM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cristina Bacchilega	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Hawai'i Legislators,

i am writing in enthusiastic support of the HCR162 Bill proposing a sustainable state-wide program supporting Poet Laureates of the State of Hawai'i.

Poetry has across space and time given vitality and strength to civic behavior and community spirit. Whether we think back to the ancient poets of Greece, William Blake's romanticism, Garcia Lorca's passion for his land, or think about a future empowered by the voices of Margaret Atwood, Audre Lorde, Leanne Simpson, Amanda Gorman, Joy Harjo (the incumbent United States Poet Laureate), poetry is the living word that fractures hypocrisy, breaks down walls, and invites us to forge new relations with one another across our differences.

As an educator in Hawai'i from 1983 into the present, i have been in awe of the creativity and talent of so many poets, storytellers, writers in Hawai'i and of their commitment to these beautiful islands, to understanding their history, to lovingly construct their future. The Poet Laureates of the State of Hawai'i program will recognize such talent and diverse voices in Hawai'i, support community-engaged workshops to facilitate creative production, and nurture the visionary and healing powers of storytelling in our lives.

I urge you to support the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities, Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, and the Hawai'i State Public Library System, and to pass the bill that will make Poet Laureates of the State of Hawai'i a reality.

Cristina Bacchilega

Professor Emerita of English

University of Hawai'i-Mānoa

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/20/2022 9:41:45 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kenneth A. Tokuno	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In recent years, Hawai`i has produced a large volume of poetry and poets, unique in the entire English speaking world due to our state's cultural diversity and history. A poet laureate would go a long way to enhancing this important work, which gives Hawai`i's people a chance to both express themselves in the special ways only poetry can as well as read and listen to such poetry as it provides the special depth of human experience that only a poem can. A poet laureate can visit schools at all levels, give and sponsor poetry readings, and spread an understanding of Hawai`i's literary accomplishment to the rest of the world.

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/20/2022 10:35:35 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amy Nishimura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Amy Nishimura and I offer testimony in support of HCR 162. Thank you for supporting the arts and humanities. We continue to live through the unimaginable, through different levels of uncertainty and it is the arts, poetry, that creates healing spaces for individuals and families. Creating art together, in a given space/community, is as *impactful as building policy*.

The people of Hawai‘i but especially the youth of Hawai‘i, need poetry in their lives. They need to hear from and work with people who look and sound like them but they also need to trust that people are listening to their narratives.

Hawai‘i endures COVID and colonial trauma and while some leaders use words like diversity and equity in slogans, campaigns, workshops and training sessions, it is *poetry and the humanities that shapes diversity and equity*.

Poets may not always want to serve as leaders but their words, their poems, recited by people of all ages, genders, and ethnicities, in many industries, serves as a call to be courageous, to live with civic responsibility, and to live with principles of aloha. Poets are authentic leaders and I hope more people will listen closely to their wisdom. I know they listen closely to all.

Thank you for supporting the Arts and Humanities.

Sincerely,

Amy Nishimura

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/20/2022 1:44:23 PM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy Aleck	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Making Meaning—Poetry for the People!

Poetry tells our stories,
Connects us to past and future,
Helps us understand the present.

Poetry allows full expression,
Offers unbridled hope,
Shoulders our pain.

Poetry builds on our best,
Paints in color,
Sings in black and white.

Poetry shines a light on who we are and
Who we could be.
Imagine a world with more poetry!

Mahalo for supporting HCR 162.

~Nancy Aleck, inspired by words, aspiring poet



***TESTIMONY OF
KEALOHA WONG
FIRST POET LAUREATE OF HAWAI‘I***

***TO THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THIRTY-FIRST
LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAI‘I
COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, ARTS, & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS***

***March 23rd, 2022
10:40am
Via Video Conference***

***RESOLUTION: HCR 162
TITLE: Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate Program***

Mahalo for introducing this resolution, which requests the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, and the Hawai‘i State Public Library system to collaborate for the establishment of a Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate program.

As the first official Poet Laureate of Hawai‘i (as declared by Governor Neil Abercrombie) and long-time poet from Honolulu, I am in full support of HCR 162. It is critical for our community to continue our oral traditions, and to deepen our legacy of literacy and creativity. The Poet Laureate program will provide the necessary support to future Poets Laureate of Hawai‘i, allowing them to promote poetry throughout the islands and abroad. I look forward to seeing this program grow and to see it flourish throughout the years. As servants of Hawai‘i, it is our responsibility to continue the education of our people and to inspire the future thinkers of tomorrow.

It is with great honor that I fully support HCR 162.

Me ke aloha pau‘ole,
Kealoa Wong

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/21/2022 5:59:49 PM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jesse Lipman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing in support of HCR162. In an era of divisiveness and misinformation poetry is a great means of understanding the perspectives of others and reflecting thoughtfully on the ways in which we experience the world. The traditions of storytelling, spoken poetry and the creative use of language to build community is deeply rooted in Hawaii. While public support for the arts has been in decline, the ability of poetry to still find ways to uplift people and tell our stories in Hawai'i continues to be strong. In the past 20 years youth poets from Hawai'i have won international poetry competitions, Hawai'i has hosted the world's largest poetry slam, and a young Micronesian UH grad student became the first keynote speaker since Nelson Mandela to get a standing ovation at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly after reading a three minute poem. We are a place that produces poetry and powerful poets in a community that welcomes their voice.

By creating a State Poet Laureate with resources and standing to work throughout the islands is a powerful means of supporting the value of poetry in Hawai'i. As a former Hawai'i Literary Arts Council Board Member and the son of an Ohio Poet Laureate I understand the impact poets with community support can make on the intellectual, artistic and social interactions of a place. They can be a beacon of creative light and motivation. However, if we expect poets to always do this work on their own dime, while juggling other jobs and without resources we limit the potential of our greatest artistic voices. Please have the courage to stand up for the arts and the humble poets. Make this bill a reality and create a platform for great poets to help us understand our world and the times we live in.

Sincerely,

Jesse Lipman

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 7:57:45 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Soto	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Rep. Cedric Asuega Gates, Chair
Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Vice Chair
Committee on Culture, Arts, & International Affairs

Elizabeth Soto
(808)306-7197

Wednesday, March 23, 2022 at 10:40 AM

Support H.C.R. No. 162: Requesting the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, State Foundation for Culture and the Arts, and the Hawai‘i State Public Library System Collaborate for the Establishment of a Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate Program

My name is Elizabeth (Lyz) Soto and I’m offering testimony **in support** of H.C.R. No. 162: Requesting the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, State Foundation for Culture and the Arts, and the Hawai‘i State Public Library System Collaborate for the Establishment of a Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate Program.

I am testifying today as a private individual, and I am also helping to develop this program as Communications Officer at Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, which is named in the resolution.

I’m supporting this resolution, because a sustainable Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate program would go a long way towards acknowledging and supporting the incredibly rich accomplishments of Hawai‘i’s literary and poetry community. For nine years, I had the privilege of being a mentor and teacher with Youth Speaks Hawai‘i (YSH) and Pacific Tongues (PT), two local spoken word organizations. In that capacity, I taught poetry and performance to youth (13-19), and I witnessed poetry change their lives in powerful permanent ways over and over again, because it gave them a creative space to explore complex difficult issues. And there is nothing quite like seeing a young person, a thirteen-year-old from Kalihi or Kailua, or Kapolei or Wai‘anae, write their way into the world—nothing quite like seeing them light up a stage with the power of their convictions and the eloquence of their language. Equally powerful was witnessing these young people build community with each other through a shared love of poetic expression. They would share ideas together, write together, work through problems together, and support each other in workshops and performances. They sought moments to share their poetry with each other. Many

of these young people have gone on to become lawyers, educators, artists, and entrepreneurs. Many of them did not perform well in school, so YSH and PT were alternative learning environments that allowed them to build confidence in the skills of using their words and their voices to express their observations, their opinions, and their desires. These experiences showed them what success could look like. This is the power of poetry.

While I was working with YSH and PT, we worked in over twenty middle schools and high schools on the island of O‘ahu. We worked on Moloka‘i, Maui, and Hawai‘i. We also worked in New Zealand, the Marshall Islands, Australia, Guåhan, and Papua New Guinea. Poetry connected us to the Pacific. Through performances and festivals it also connected us to California, Washington D.C., Illinois, New York, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. Poetry generated opportunities for stories of and from Hawai‘i to be spoken to and heard by people across the state, across the United States and the Pacific.

Throughout my time at YSH and PT, the demand for workshops and performances was ever increasing, however the ability to support that work was never able to match the demand. I support H.C.R. 162 because a sustained Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate Program would create structures that could raise the visibility of poets and poetry in Hawai‘i; it could help build and sustain a literary community that connects the pae‘āina; it could raise support for work that would make poetry accessible to more communities throughout Hawai‘i.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Elizabeth Soto

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 8:58:05 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dawn Sueoka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rep. Cedric Asuega Gates, Chair

Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Vice Chair

Members of the House Committee on Culture, Arts & International Affairs

Re: HCR162

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

10:40 AM Rm. 329

Aloha kākou,

I am writing **in support of HCR162**: Requesting the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities, State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, and the Hawai‘i State Public Library System to collaborate for the establishment of a Hawai‘i state poet laureate program.

Though I am testifying as an individual citizen, I also serve on the board of the Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities.

Poetry, though its imagery, startling juxtapositions, and inventive use of language, often disrupts our typical patterns of thinking. It creates moments of surprise, imagination, connection, vulnerability, and compassion.

I work as an archivist, and amidst all the history books on my shelves are books of poetry. I value the voices of poets because they help me to understand the ongoing impacts of historical events, question my assumptions, deepen connections to the past, and envision alternate futures.

Through public events and workshops and publications, a Hawai'i state poet laureate will inspire people to create these kinds of spaces through language and community building, thereby empowering us to care more deeply for each other and for Hawai'i.

For these reasons, I strongly support the establishment of a poet laureate program for Hawai'i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Dawn Sueoka

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 9:46:40 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Moira Pirsch	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

“An artist is a sort of emotional or spiritual historian. His role is to make you realize the doom and glory of knowing who you are and what you are. He has to tell, because nobody else can tell, what it is like to be alive.” - James Baldwin

“The genre of poetry can use everyday statements for political analysis. A metaphor can be more political than a declarative statement because it gets to the heart of the feeling, and a metaphor says many things in a small moment.” - Haunani-Kay Trask

I write this as the Education Director of the Maui Arts & Cultural Center. The Poet Laureate program is important because it supports more artists writing and telling the story of Hawai‘i. As a teenage poet and educator from Wisconsin, I first learned about poetry in Hawai‘i from the then poet laureate, Kealoha, and the Brave New Voices Youth Poetry team, including Jamaica Osorio and coached by Lyz Soto. As a white person from the continental US, who is now in a leadership role in Hawai‘i, I can say that these poets taught me the most important histories, theories, and understandings that one needs to know when doing work in this place. The importance of knowing the histories of the culture and languages of the land guide me in my everyday work and help me be the best educator to support teachers, artists and community members.

At the MACC, we are also joining the hundreds of cities who are developing Youth Poet Laureate Programs and I am certain there are great avenues for collaboration to support not only adult poets but also youth.

I fully support the Poet Laureate program and am willing to discuss this and support in any way I can.

Mahalo,

Moira Pirsch, PhD 608-772-2597

Moira@mauiarts.org

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 9:59:00 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Kraus	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am a long-time Professor of English at Chaminade University. I'm also a product of the Hawai'i public education system (Leilehua HS, UH-Manoa). And I am a past-president of the Hawai'i Literary Arts Council.

I strongly support HCR 162, which aims to establish a much needed Hawai'i State Poet Laureate.

Such a position will help support the nurturing of creativity and creative expression throughout Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Jim Kraus

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 10:41:52 AM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Misty-Lynn Sanico	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am testifying as a writer and reader who has focused on Hawaii writers and books for the last ten years. A program such as this is much needed. It would strengthen our already vibrant local literary community and provide yet another outlet for people to participate in and create literature and art, to share their voice and perspectives, and to learn from others. We have talented home-grown writers and poets who are internationally recognized, award winners. They are teachers, professors, nurses, and businessmen. A program like this would bring focus to poetry and the humanities in Hawaii and would be something to aspire to--an official title that would help perpetuate the unique qualities of our local literary scene while also encouraging its growth and proliferation.

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 12:20:15 PM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Teri L Skillman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I write in support of HCR162 to establish a SFCA Poet Laureate Program. It has been 10 years since Steven Kealohapau'ole Hong-Ming Wong (Kealoha) was designated as the first official Hawaii Poet Laureate by Governor Neil Abercrombie on May 3, 2012.

Mahalo,

Teri Skillman

HCR-162

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 7:52:53 PM

Testimony for CAI on 3/23/2022 10:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Wayne Tanaka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Gates, Vice Chair Tam, and members of the Culture, Arts, & International Affairs Committee,

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT** of HCR162 and HR162, which would uplift the voices of the many incredibly talented poets, artists, storytellers, musicians, and creative minds who call Hawai'i home.

Hawai'i's rich and diverse cultural and social fabric, combined with our complex history and deep connections to each other and our island home, has provided us with a fertile creative landscape that has already given rise to poetic and artistic legacies that continue to resonate throughout our islands and far beyond our shores. A poet laureate program as proposed in this resolution will help us to further realize our islands' creative potential, and allow our poets, artists, writers, and creators to enrich the lives and consciousnesses of our present and future generations both in Hawai'i and throughout the world.

Accordingly, I respectfully urge the Committee to **PASS** HCR162 and HR162.

Mahalo nui,

Wayne Tanaka