



HAWAII

STATE FOUNDATION on
CULTURE and the ARTS

No. 1 Capitol District Building
250 South Hotel Street
Second Floor
Honolulu, HI 96813

Governor
David Y. Ige

Comptroller
Curt T. Otaguro

Chairperson
Lloyd I. Unebasami

Commissioners
Susan Browne
Nalani Brun
Jane Clement
Kālewa Correa
Ronald Michioka
Karen Tiller Polivka
Clyde Sakamoto
Allison Wong

Executive Director
Jonathan Johnson

Telephone
808.586.0300

Fax
808.586.0308

Website
sfca.hawaii.gov

**TESTIMONY OF
THE STATE FOUNDATION ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS
TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE CULTURE, ARTS, & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
Wednesday, April 13, 2022/Conf Rm 329 via Videoconference 10:00 a.m.
S.C.R. 83**

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 S.C.R. 83.

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 Hawai'i 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 Hawai'i 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 Waiʻālae 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, and International Affairs

April 12, 2022

Dear Representative Gates, Representative Tam, and the 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 SCR83, 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.

I stand on my testimony submitted last month on this resolution. The resolution before you is the same as the one your committee had heard previously and had passed at that time with no revisions. To move all the way through, this resolution requires one more hearing in the House Finance Committee.

Last month, I shared about the power of the partnerships named in this resolution: between three statewide entities committed to rich and equitable programming across our islands. I also spoke about how poetry strengthens civic engagement through creating space for people to share and listen with courage and compassion to each other. I gave examples of community-engaged poetry to show that our vision of poetry is not about a single author, but about building community.

I would like to add one more story to my testimony. I have seen many times how the creativity of poetry can push us to think differently. For example, I have seen how poetry can help us look at negative and heavy things in our lives that hold us down, and instead rewrite our stories in ways that help us move and live differently.

I wrote this poem some years ago, inspired by a student in my UH-Mānoa literature class. She was very strong and caring, and I hope she is doing really well.

**Women Who Are Poems Shouldn't Fail
Literature Class**

Do you remember when you were 18
and you had come to talk to me
about failing Biology
about failing Economics?
You felt like a failure.
School had promised you
a new, shiny future.
Instead, you found yourself
inspected and dissected
by teachers and scantrons.

You told me:
I wanted to help my mother: B-
She's struggling: maybe a C+
So I majored in business: F
We were homeless for 3 months before, and I
never want to go back to that: D/D-

I remember all the doors and windows wide
open.
I remember seeing every empty room in you, in
that drafty light.
And I heard your voice echo in that lonely
house.

Most of all, I remember how awful it felt
to see you hold on to that story, like a good girl,
as if it were the only story you had.

Do you remember our literature class?
How you were worried you weren't good
enough,
pretty enough, smart enough, to write a poem?

You wrote one anyway. And memorized it.

About brave love bleeding,
about an ocean of feeling,
about speaking.

And on that last day of class,
when you stood in front of all of us
I remember how you rose
like the wind storming through our houses.

Loud enough to make us stop.
And listen.
And breathe
the salt air, your dark hair,
The story you are, the one
we could never write.

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

SCR-83

Submitted on: 4/12/2022 9:10:47 AM

Testimony for CAI on 4/13/2022 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eric	Bamboo Ridge Press	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom It May Concern:

As a DOE/Artists in the Schools traveling Poet in the School for over 20 years, having visited almost every school in the entire state, having had the pleasure to interact with students of every grade, having taught at the undergraduate and graduate university levels as well, and having seen the positive impact of poetry appreciation and original creative writing in people's lives, especially as it relates to topics and voices that are clearly representative of life in Hawai'i, having seen first-hand the tremendous motivating force a national poet laureate can be, especially if well-organized projects are implemented to elicit poetic expressions that resonate at the individual and community levels, I take a strong position in support of establishing a poet laureate for our state.

Poetry has a long tradition of representing the best values of a given community, of helping to nurture and cultivate a rich and vibrant culture, and to bring out the humanity that needs to be shared by all. Whether it is written academic poetry, contemporary oral poetry, poetry in the language of a subculture within our community, or poetry representing a minority group, cultures grow stronger when enriched by the diversity of views which poetry can evoke as we evolve toward whatever unknown future awaits. Poetry and all the arts have always pointed toward new ways to live better lives.

While many think of poetry and the lofty term Poet Laureate as stuffy and old-fashioned, we know that contemporary poetry also includes young, new poets grounded in oral performance. While many think of poetry as something only labored over in school, we know that for decades poetry has provided important channels for those in prisons, halfway houses, juvenile detention centers, veterans support groups, old folks homes, grief support groups, women's groups, and other community settings.

When thinking of poetry we often focus on the the academic skills that we hope to teach all our students, but we must not forget the personal life lessons contained within the poems, the humor and the joy, the ongoing history that is sometimes preserved from someone's family stories, the inner solace that can be found in writing through tough times or in sharing heartfelt words with a friend far away. When taken as a whole, poetry is varied, it appeals to a variety of audiences, it performs a variety of functions, and it addresses a variety of cultural needs and goals.

Given all that poetry can mean for a group, a culture, a society, and how a poet laureate can be an organizing force to help achieve those goals, not to mention how relatively inexpensive it usually is to implement poetry programs, the state would be well-served by the passage of this bill, SCR83, to establish a poet laureate for the state of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Eric Chock

SCR-83

Submitted on: 4/11/2022 6:09:58 PM

Testimony for CAI on 4/13/2022 10:00:00 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 strong support of SCR 83.

Creating art, poetry, music, and literature, in a given space or community, is as impactful as building policy. The people of Hawai‘i but especially the youth of Hawai‘i need poetry throughout their educational journeys. 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*. They need to internalize that their voices are valued as they share their beautiful labor with the world.

Hawai‘i endures COVID and colonial trauma and while some leaders use words like diversity and equity in slogans, campaigns, workshops or corporate training, it is poetry and the humanities that shapes diversity and equity. Our poets do not merely tell people they are valued; they show people how they are valued.

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 your time and service.

Sincerely, Amy Nishimura

SCR-83

Submitted on: 4/11/2022 6:36:00 PM

Testimony for CAI on 4/13/2022 10:00:00 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, April 13, 2022 at 10:00 AM

Support S.C.R. No. 83: 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

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

My name is Elizabeth (Lyz) Soto. I offered offered my testimony in support of H.C.R. 162 and I am now offering my testimony **in support** of S.C.R. No. 83: 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.

In addition to my supporting statements offered below, I would like to add that it has been a powerful experience to read through the testimonials offered by our community in support of this resolution. One testimonial observes that the words of poets can serve as a call to be courageous and to live with principles of aloha. Another states that poetry allows us to build bridges and, through its inventive use of language and ideas, can disrupt typical patterns of thinking. Words and ideas are indeed some of the fundamental building blocks to a healthy civically engaged society and establishing this position would signal to our young people that words and ideas are valued by our community.

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 and the exploration of ideas. They would share viewpoints together, write together, work through problems together, and support each other in workshops and performances. They actively 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 S.C.R. 83 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

SCR-83

Submitted on: 4/11/2022 9:45:29 PM

Testimony for CAI on 4/13/2022 10:00:00 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 SCR 83.



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

***TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, ARTS, AND INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS***

***April 13th, 2022
10:00am
Via Video Conference***

***RESOLUTION: SCR 83
TITLE: Hawai‘i State Poet Laureate Program***

Mahalo for considering 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 SCR 83. 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 SCR 83.

Me ke aloha pau‘ole,
Kealoa Wong

SCR-83

Submitted on: 4/12/2022 6:59:23 AM

Testimony for CAI on 4/13/2022 10:00:00 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: SCR 83

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

10:00 AM Rm. 329

Aloha kākou,

I am writing **in support of SCR 83**: 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

SCR-83

Submitted on: 4/12/2022 9:16:01 AM

Testimony for CAI on 4/13/2022 10:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Poetry unites us. It inspires empathy for others and helps us recognize ourselves and our place in the larger community.

The first poem I read by a Hawai‘i writer was published in an issue of *Bamboo Ridge Journal of Hawai‘i Literature and Arts*. It was a poem in pidgin by Lee Tonouchi and it brought me such joy to read. So I read some more, and read some more, and pretty soon the books was pau and I was picking up another.

The poems and stories in the pages of *Bamboo Ridge* were an inspiration. For there it was in black and white, stories I could relate to, that were a reflection of how we live and grow here. Stories like my family stories. It was the elation of finding a perfect puka shell in the dried up, picked-through piles of sand left on the beach or the disappointment of running down the street with two wrong slippahs and juuuuust missing the manapua man. The poems and stories in *Bamboo Ridge* energized and nourished me and I wanted to write and share my own.

The first time I became a published writer was for a short poem that was published in the 100th Issue of *Bamboo Ridge* and I haven’t looked back since. I even work with them now.

For almost forty-five years *Bamboo Ridge Press* has been providing a platform for local writers to share their voices and perspectives. Eighty percent of the submissions received for potential publication are poems. That’s a lot of home-grown poetry that wants an audience, and that’s just in *Bamboo Ridge*, not counting all the other organizations and publishers in our vibrant literary community who feel and recognize the need to provide more space for local poets. *Bamboo Ridge Press* has published over one thousand individual writers and has readers across the globe from China to the Netherlands and even the Ukraine.

Hawai‘i literature has a global impact and a State recognized Poet Laureate project will greatly strengthen the literary community in these islands. It will help inspire young writers and perpetuate the work of older generations.