



HAWAII

STATE FOUNDATION on
CULTURE and the ARTS

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**TESTIMONY OF
THE STATE FOUNDATION ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE LABOR, CULTURE AND THE ARTS
Monday, March 28, 2022/Conf Rm 225 via Videoconference 3:00 p.m.
S.C.R. 83/S.R. 75**

Chair Taniguchi 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/S.R. 75

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.

SCR-83

Submitted on: 3/25/2022 9:45:40 AM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

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/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: 3/25/2022 11:42:39 AM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

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.

SCR-83

Submitted on: 3/25/2022 3:19:04 PM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I submit this testimony in favor of SCR 83 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 Laureate to materialize into reality.

Me ka mahalo nui,

Shawna Yang Ryan



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Senator Brian Taniguchi, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Vice Chair
Committee on Labor, Culture, and the Arts

March 26, 2022

Dear Senator Taniguchi, Senator Ihara, and the members of the Senate Committee on Labor, Culture, and the Arts,

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.

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

SCR-83

Submitted on: 3/26/2022 11:54:28 AM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brandy Nalani McDougall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

Though it may not be widely known, Hawai‘i has a very vibrant, dynamic, innovative and community-engaged poetry community. Moreover, our poetry community is unique since it emerges out of the specialness of Hawai‘i and spans across generations, enabling elementary-aged children thru kupuna to engage and contribute their poetic work and perspectives. Given that Hawai‘i's poetry community has been active and prominent for so long, it is long overdue for Hawai‘i to have a state poet laureate program.

Having a state poet laureate program would go far in promoting the arts, writing, and creative expression among Hawai‘i's people because the Poet Laureate would be upheld as a role model to encourage our communities to explore and engage with poetry from Hawai‘i, the Pacific, and elsewhere. It would also foster educational programs and partnerships between schools, libraries, museums, community centers, and non-profit institutions devoted to writing and speaking skills development and overall creative expression.

While these alone would go far in supporting our children and communities via education, poetry has also been used and found to be effective in helping people of all ages work through trauma and mental health issues because of its emphasis on voice, its openness as a genre to emotionality, and the element of language play that enables those writing poetry to feel a sense of creative freedom. I share this as a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi poet who knows that poetry probably saved my life at a time, when I was working through family trauma I survived and desperately needed to develop coping skills and practices of self-reflection as part of healing.

More than 30 years later, poetry is still a tremendous source of reflection and health for me, but it also provides a way for me to connect with others in our Hawai‘i communities, as well as folks in other parts of the Pacific, on the continental U.S., and around the world. So, aside from the poet laureate program encouraging writing, creative expression, and mental health and community within Hawai‘i, it would also those engaging with poetry to connect with others outside of Hawai‘i in very meaningful ways.

As it is, all of these wonderful things are already happening thanks to the largely grassroots poetry community in Hawai‘i; but with the backing of the State of Hawai‘i in creating a Poet Laureate program, there would be greater support, visibility, and encouragement that would

enable all of these wonderful benefits to grow and reach even more of our people in Hawai'i. For all of these reasons and more, I urge you to support SCR83. Mahalo for your time and attention.



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

***TO THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR, CULTURE, AND THE ARTS***

***March 28th, 2022
3:00pm
Via Video Conference***

***RESOLUTION: SCR 83
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 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,
Kealoha Wong

SCR-83

Submitted on: 3/27/2022 10:33:35 AM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
D. Kealiʻi MacKenzie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Senate Committee On Labor, Culture And The Arts
Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair

Members: Senator Stanley Chang, Senator Kurt Fevella
Senator, Jarrett Keohokalole

I am heartened that the Poet Laureate position is based on collaboration between the aforementioned agencies and organizations - all of which have a proven record of service to public programming on the arts and humanities.

While a decade ago former governor Abercrombie had appointed the poet Kealoha as state laureate, the poet did not have the insitu8tiopnal; support to implement the community outreach and programing I know he envisioned. This partnership is a unique opportunity that should be seized upon.

As Hawaii emerges from the global pandemic, community-based programs such as poetry workshops for students, communities, and the people of Hawaii will play a vital role in building community and social connections.

As a former Poet-facilitator for Pacific Tongues - a non-profit organization that focused on community-based writing workshops for youth - I saw firsthand how important it was for participants to not only have a space to write as a community but establish friendships and networks with writing peers. Exposure to these workshops also had the benefit of encouraging students to further their education and commitment to the arts, and many have given back by working for arts or humanities-based organizations.

It is without any reservations that I support, and urge you to support Senate Concurrent Resolution 83 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.

SCR-83

Submitted on: 3/27/2022 11:33:47 AM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Chair

Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair

Members of the Senate Committee on Labor, Culture, and the Arts

Re: SCR 83

Monday, March 28, 2022

3:00 PM Rm. 225

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: 3/27/2022 12:57:10 PM

Testimony for LCA on 3/28/2022 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Senator Brian Taniguchi, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Vice Chair
Committee on Labor, Culture, and the Arts

Elizabeth Soto
(808)306-7197

Wednesday, March 28, 2022 at 3:00 PM
SUPPORT S.C.R. 83

My name is Elizabeth (Lyz) Soto and I'm offering 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.

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 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