

Letter of support for establishing an Austin Poet Laureate program

Dear Austin City Council,

Since the 1600's, poet laureate positions have existed in cities, states, and countries to be stewards of poetry in their communities through programs that positively impact the general public. As of 2022, Austin is the only major city in Texas without a Poet Laureate program, and we, the undersigned, are of the belief that Austin could benefit from a socio-politically engaged Poet Laureate who uses poetry as a way to promote literacy across the city and to integrate poetry into the fabric of Austin's history, politics, and culture.

According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Texas ranks 42nd among states supporting artists in the US¹. As of 2003, 121,074 adults in Central Texas either cannot read or struggle with reading². For decades, many local organizations have created and nurtured Austin's poetry scene with little to no budget and recognition, yet, University of Texas at Austin has one of the most nationally recognized MFA programs^{3,4}, and Austin markets itself as a mecca for Texas arts. Having a poet laureate program would keep Austin accountable to its promise of being the arts center of Texas, and assist with improving Austin's literacy rate. Also, local poets deserve an opportunity to shine.

An adult Poet Laureate program has the potential to inspire Austin residents to read and write; to celebrate Austin's literary scene; to nurture and amplify Austin-based poets of all ages through performances, teaching, and public speaking; and to create new ways of understanding Austin's policies and culture via poems written by the Poet Laureate. We, the undersigned, call on Austin City Council to please do the following:

- Pass a resolution that makes Austin Poet Laureate an official city program run by the Austin Public Library, and provides Austin Public Library the authority to choose a Poet Laureate.
- Set aside \$27,000 biennially in the City of Austin's budget for the Austin Poet Laureate program in perpetuity.
- Allow Austin Public Library to establish a City Poet Laureate Committee that includes a representative of the library, a representative of the arts commission, and members of the city's literature community. The City Poet Laureate Committee will review applications and recommend City Poet Laureate nominees to the head of the public library.

¹ https://nasaa-arts.org/research/funding/#nasaa_field_8

²

<https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=208375#:~:text=Why%20is%20literacy%20so%20important%3F&text=121%2C074%20adults%20in%20Central%20Texas%20cannot%20read%20or%20struggle%20with%20reading.&text=43%25%20of%20all%20adults%20with%20lowest%20literacy%20levels%20live%20in%20poverty.>

³ <https://www.collegetransitions.com/blog/best-mfa-creative-writing-programs/>

⁴ <https://designdash.com/2023/12/13/these-are-the-best-creative-writing-mfa-programs-in-the-u-s/>

Gratefully,

WANT TO SIGN? PLEASE SIGN [HERE](#).

KB Brookins, Austin-based poet and community member
Celina Zisman, Austin Arts Commission D8, Chair
Richard Santos, Austin Bat Cave
Gaby Benitez, Austin-based poet