

Date of Hearing: June 19, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, TOURISM, AND  
INTERNET MEDIA

Kansen Chu, Chair

SB 748 (Stern) – As Introduced February 22, 2019

**SENATE VOTE:** 38-0

**SUBJECT:** California Youth Poet Laureate.

**SUMMARY:** This bill establishes the position of California Youth Poet Laureate, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the position of California Youth Poet Laureate.
- 2) Provides that the Youth Poet Laureate shall serve for a term of two years, and be appointed by the Governor from a list of three nominees 13 to 19 years of age provided by the California Arts Council (CAC), as specified.
- 3) Requires that each nominee for Youth Poet Laureate reside in California at the time of the submission of nomination, and requires the Youth Poet Laureate to reside in California during their term.
- 4) Requires the CAC, upon appropriation of funds by the Legislature, to provide an annual stipend of \$10,000 to the Youth Poet Laureate, and to pay the travel expenses of the Youth Poet Laureate incurred, as specified.
- 5) Requires the Youth Poet Laureate, as a condition of the appointment, to assume specified minimum responsibilities.
- 6) Exempts contracts entered into by the Youth Poet Laureate, pursuant to this bill, from specified statutes regulating contracting with minors involved in the arts, entertainment, and professional sports.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the position of California Poet Laureate, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate from a list of nominees garnered by the CAC.
- 2) Establishes, pursuant to the Dixon-Zenovich-Maddy California Arts Act of 1975, the CAC, and sets forth duties of the CAC in promoting arts in the state.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, an annual stipend of \$10,000 per year for the Youth Poet Laureate, and ongoing costs of less than \$10,000 per year for expenses for the Youth Poet Laureate and a chaperone including travel to readings, travel requested by the Arts Council, and costs to fulfill the required project. (General Fund)

Additionally, one-time costs of \$5,000 for a contractor to establish the nomination panel and one-time costs of less than \$1,000 for expenses to hold the one-day panel. (General Fund)

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) *Author and supporter's statement of need for legislation.* According to the Author, "Poetry provides a mechanism by which people can understand experiences and perspectives that they do not share. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, poetry readership in the U.S. has risen by 76 percent in the past five years. The new audience is young, diverse, and non-academic. Poetry in education has also experienced a renaissance through the national recitation contest, Poetry Out Loud, administered statewide by the California Arts Council for the past 14 consecutive years. "Additionally, poetry has become a means of political and personal expression in the younger generation in California, engaging nonprofit literary organizations to cultivate spoken word as a means of involving and embracing adolescents in their communities. SB 748 would allow teens that already write poetry to be recognized for their accomplishments and skills, further encouraging investment and development in the arts and opening innovative and unique venues for speaking and listening opportunities for youth statewide.

"The position of Youth Poet Laureate will assist in outreach to California schools, while working in partnership with the California Arts Council. Having representation from their own age demographic will increase the likelihood of teens exploring poetry, which will increase literacy and creativity. Writing and performing poetry is universal and relevant to teens, including ELLs who can learn about or read poetry in their primary language, helping them bridge their worlds."

The California Cultural Districts Coalition adds in their support, "We must provide opportunities to inspire young artists in California to share their talents and express their feelings in artistic ways. This can lead to greater dialogues within our communities and increase awareness for diversity and inclusion. Young people are the next generation of leaders and we must encourage them to be creative and resilient."

- 2) *Background:*

- a) *CAC and poets.* The CAC was created in 1975 under then Governor Jerry Brown to increase access to the arts for all Californians. The Dixon-Zenovich-Maddy California Arts Act of 1975 directs the CAC to encourage artistic awareness, participation, and expression; to help independent local groups develop their own arts programs; to promote employment of artists and those skilled in crafts in the public and private sector; to provide for exhibition of artistic works in public buildings; and, to enlist the aid of all state agencies in the task of ensuring the fullest expression of artistic potential.

One of the cornerstone projects conducted by the CAC annually is the statewide Poetry Out Loud competition, which according to their website is, "An initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, administered statewide by the California Arts Council, Poetry Out Loud encourages high school students to learn about poetry through memorization, performance, and competition. Participants master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about literary history and contemporary life. California's Poetry Out Loud is the largest event of its kind in the U.S., and has grown steadily since its inception. The 2019 competition series encompasses 52 counties, 305 schools, and 730 teachers, reaching nearly 60,600 students statewide."

The California Arts Council also manages the nomination process for the California Poet Laureate as established by law.

- b) *State Poet Laureate.* In California, the position of California Poet Laureate was established in 2001 by AB 113 (Pavley, Chapter 206, Statutes of 2001). Prior to being established in statute, the Legislature had conferred the honorary title of Poet Laureate on five individuals. Ina Donna Coolbrith, California's first Poet Laureate (and first Poet Laureate of any American state) was crowned with a laurel wreath at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco by Benjamin Ide Wheeler, President of the University of California, who called her the "loved, laurel-crowned poet of California." In 1919 Coolbrith was conferred official status as "The Loved Laurel Crowned Poet of California" by SCR 24 (Slater, Resolution Chapter 51, Statutes of 1919). The last Poet Laureate recognized by Legislative Resolution was Charles "Gus" Garrigus, who also served as a member of the State Legislature. He held the title for 34 years, his death in 2000 led to legislation establishing the official position in statute.

Today, the California Poet Laureate is a Governor's appointee whose mission is to advocate for the art of poetry in classrooms and boardrooms across the state, to inspire an emerging generation of literary artists, and to educate all Californians about the many poets and authors who have influenced our great state through creative literary expression. Over the course of a two-year term, the Poet Laureate provides public readings in urban and rural locations across California, educates civic and state leaders about the value of poetry and creative expression, and undertakes a significant cultural project, with one of its goals being to bring poetry to students who might otherwise have little opportunity to be exposed.

3) *Prior and related legislation.*

- a) SB 237 (Hertzberg), of the current legislative session, would establish in state government the position of the California Laureate for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, as specified. (Pending referral in Assembly)
- b) AB 113 (Pavley), Chapter 206, Statutes of 2001, established the position of California Poet Laureate, and required the Poet Laureate to perform specified duties.
- c) SCR 24 (Slater), Resolution Chapter 51, Statutes of 1919, named Ina Coolbrith as "The Loved Laurel Crowned Poet of California," the state's first Poet Laureate – she held that title until her death in 1928.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

California Alliance for Arts Education  
 California Arts Advocates/Californians for the Arts  
 California Cultural Districts Coalition  
 City of Moorpark  
 Valley Cultural Foundation  
 4 individuals

**Opposition**

There is no opposition on file.

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