

**Testimony In Support of SCR 4002 with Modification or a Broader View
Senate Education Committee – 16 Jan 2023**

Chairman Elkin & Members of the Committee,

My name is Bonnie Staiger. While I am a registered lobbyist – mostly retired (#186), I'm not here in a professional capacity but as a private citizen actively pursuing life writing poetry and as an Associate Poet Laureate.

I'm here in support of Denise Lajimodiere serving as our next Poet Laureate. Nothing I'm about to say should dilute the fact that she is the best person to hold the title and continue this role at this time.

Going forward, North Dakota needs a mechanism for naming future Laureates with realistic terms of service and one that offers continuity outside the purview of the legislature. No other state names Laureates for a life sentence, er, I mean service. For some background, I've attached a list of several smaller or nearby states and how their Laureates are chosen and their terms.

I understand a Senate bill is being drafted (Sen. Karen Krebsbach, sponsor?) that may offer practical protocols for the legislature's consideration. I hope you will keep this conversation open to look at those options as a forward-thinking mechanism gets codified and while naming Denise Lajimodiere Poet Laureate.

Thank you.

According to Michael Wood: Shakespeare said, "poets and writers are the explorers of the human heart and long after the conquerors of the governed, their legacy will be the most valuable to us."

**Bonnie Larson Staiger
ND Associate Poet Laureate**

In Plains Sight published by NDSU Press (2021)

WILLA Literary Award Finalist in Poetry

Nominated for the PEN America Literary Award in Poetry

Midwest Independent Publishers Award – Silver Medal

Destiny Manifested published by NDSU Press (2018)

Poets of the Plains & Prairies Poetry Prize

Independent Press Award: Distinguished Favorite

Both books available from NDSU Press <https://bit.ly/3CN1Ax0>
and Amazon

www.bonniestaiger.com

State Poets Laureate (Selected: low population / mostly rural)

from Library of Congress <https://guides.loc.gov/united-states-state-poets-laureate/current>

(BLS Note: The Library of Congress website lists 4 states with No Position: Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. This could be because those states have larger metro areas that may have a local poet laureate. Philadelphia, for example, has a PL for example and many larger metro areas have city and/or county PL. 3-4 states are listed with Position Currently Vacant.)

Current North Dakota Laureate: Larry Woiwode (deceased 2022)

Start of Term: 1995

Position History: Position established February 8, 1957 ([Senate Concurrent Resolution E, 1957 S.L., p. 843](#)). It is a lifetime position; however, the [Academy of American Poets notes External](#) that on June 25, 2004, "Woiwode named seven associates to help bring 'an enlightened literary consciousness' to people around the state: Dave Solheim, Shadd Piehl, Madelyn Camrud, Rick Watson, Heid Erdrich, Louise Erdrich, and Jamie Parsley." (footnote: he named Bonnie Larson Staiger in 2019)

On June 20, 2019, current poet laureate Larry Woiwode [named Bonnie Larson Staiger External](#) an Associate Poet Laureate "to help bring an increased awareness of poetry to people around the state." The official installation ceremony occurred July 10, 2019. During the three weeks between Woiwode's announcement and the installation ceremony, and unbeknownst to Woiwode at the time, the Budget Section of North Dakota's Legislative Branch considered a grant transfer proposal from the state Council on the Arts that would have eliminated the entire poet laureate program. The Budget Section [rejected the request External](#) in a 34-1 vote.

In 2000, David Solheim was named North Dakota Centennial Poet by the North Dakota Centennial Commission.

Previous Laureates:

- Corbin A. Waldron (1957-April 1978)
- Henry R. Martinson (1979-November 1981)
- Lydia O. Jackson (1979-April 1984)

Current South Dakota Laureate: Christine Stewart-Nuñez *see BLS note below

Start of Term: July 1, 2019

Position History: Position established 1937 with the appointment of Charles "Badger" Clark. Position enacted by Legislature in 1959 (SL 1959, ch 307; SDC Supp 1960, § 55.0115). Text of law available online as part of the South Dakota Codified Laws, [Sec. 1-22-7](#). The laureate is "appointed by the Governor to serve during the pleasure of the Governor."

On September 27, 2014, poet laureate David Allan Evans resigned after more than 12 years in office in order to [provide an opportunity for other poets to serve in the position External](#). He served as Poet Laureate Emeritus until the appointment of Lee Ann Roripaugh as the state's next Poet Laureate.

On March 13, 2015, [Senate Bill 86](#), which limits the term of the South Dakota Poet Laureate to four years, was signed into law by Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

Previous Laureates:

- Charles "Badger" Clark (1937)
- Audrae Visser (1974-October 2001)
- David Allan Evans (June 15, 2002-September 27, 2014)
- Lee Ann Roripaugh (July 1, 2015-June 30, 2019)

* BLS Note: Christine Stewart-Nuñez vacated her appointment when she moved to Winnipeg. Applications for her replacement are being accepted by the SD State Poetry Society. According to their website:

The term will be from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2027. The SD State Poetry Society is tasked with finding a suitable South Dakota poet to recommend to our Governor for consideration for appointment as Poet Laureate for a four-year term of office.

The potential candidate needs to be a South Dakota resident with a recognized, published body of work. The successful candidate is expected to actively promote and encourage the writing of poetry in South Dakota through workshops, speaking engagements, etc. No actual monetary salary exists for this position, but funding to pursue programs may be available from various sources.

Applications will be accepted beginning Nov.1, 2022, through Nov.30, 2022. If interested, go to SDPOETRY.ORG and click on Submissions/SD Poet Laureate. Click on the link to Submittable.com. Include a cover letter stating how you would be an ambassador for poetry in South Dakota. Innovative ideas for inspiring the writing and sharing of poetry are important components of the nomination. Please attach a resume and bio. Please also attach a Word file (xxx.docx) that includes a representative sample of published work (up to 20 pages) in one document.

Current Montana Laureate: Mark Gibbons

Start of Term: August 25, 2021

Position History: [Senate Bill 69](#), which creates the honorary, unpaid post of Montana state poet laureate, was signed into law by Gov. Brian Schweitzer on March 24, 2005. The first Montana state poet laureate, Sandra Alcosser, was appointed by Gov. Schweitzer on July 13, 2005. Laureates serve a two-year term. The 2012-2012 poets laureate, Melissa Kwasny and Mandy Smoker Broaddus, were the first to share the position.

Previous Laureates:

- Sandra Alcosser (July 13, 2005-July 13, 2007)
- Greg Pape (August 14, 2007-September 2009)
- Henry Real Bird (September 25, 2009-August 2011)
- Sheryl Noethe (August 2, 2011-July 31, 2013)
- Tami Haaland (August 1, 2013-October 22, 2015)
- Michael Earl Craig (October 23, 2015-July 31, 2017)
- Lowell Jaeger (August 1, 2017-July 30, 2019)
- Melissa Kwasny and Mandy Smoker Broaddus (July 31, 2019-August 2021)

Further Resources

[Montana Arts Council's Poet Laureate Page](#)

Current West Virginia Laureate: Marc Harshman

Start of Term: May 17, 2012

Position History: Position established 1927 (*Code*, [Sec. 29-7-1](#)). The text of the law follows: §29-7-1. Appointment; qualifications; salary.

There shall be a poet laureate of West Virginia, who shall be appointed by, and serve during the will and pleasure of the governor. No person shall be eligible to such appointment who is not a resident of this state, and who has not written and published poems of recognized merit. The poet laureate shall receive an annual salary of two thousand dollars, payable in equal quarterly installments.

The first West Virginia state poet laureate was Karl Myers. The poet laureate is appointed by the governor and, previously, served "during the will and pleasure of the governor." Currently, laureates serve a term of two years with no restrictions on reappointment.

Previous Laureates:

- Karl Myers (1927-1937)
- Roy Lee Harmon (March 12, 1937-1943)
- James Lowell McPherson (1943-1946)
- Roy Lee Harmon (October 11, 1946-1960)
- Vera Andrews Harvey (1960-1961)
- Roy Lee Harmon (March 7, 1961-1979)
- Louise McNeill (Pease) (1979-1993)
- Irene McKinney (1994-February 4, 2012)

Current Idaho Laureate: CMarie Fuhrman (Official Title: Writer in Residence)

Start of Term: July 1, 2021

Position History: The position of Idaho Poet Laureate was established in 1923 with the appointment of Irene Welsh Grissom by Governor C. C. Moore. Following the death of Sudie Stuart Hager in 1982, the position was changed to Writer-in-Residence.

Previous Laureates:

- Irene Welsh Grissom (1923-1948)
- Sudie Stuart Hager (1949-1982)
- Ron McFarland (1984-1985) (first person named Writer-in-Residence)
- Robert Wrigley (1986-1987) Eberle Umbach
- (1988-1989) Neidy Messer (1990-1991)
- Daryl Jones (1992-1993)
- Clay Morgan (1994-1995)
- Lance Olsen (1996-1998)
- Bill Johnson (1999-2000)
- Jim Irons (July 2, 2001-2004)
- Kim Barnes (April 2004-2006)
- Anthony "Tony" Doerr (July 2007-July 2010)
- Brady Udall (July 1, 2010-June 20, 2013)
- Diane Raptosh (July 1, 2013-2016)
- Christian Winn (July 1, 2016-June 2019)
- Malia Collins, Boise (July 1, 2019-June 2021)

Further Resources

[Detailed history of the Writer-in-Residence award from the Idaho Commission on the Arts](#)