

2023 Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2023

Chairman Elkin and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Hello, my name is Kim Konikow, and I am Executive Director of North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA). I am here today to talk a bit Senate Concurrent Resolution 4002, introduced by Senator Tim Mathern regarding the State Poet Laureate position.

We are one of 50 states and several territories, part of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Of these, 46* have a Poet Laureate, either by Gubernatorial appointment, or selected by panel through the state humanities or arts councils; very few are named by a Legislative body. There are a variety of term limits, responsibilities, and payments, ranging from 2- 6 years {with only three in perpetuity}.

This is an honorary post which promotes reading, writing and an appreciation of poetry. Most of the Poet Laureates have published a book, have a long history of their writing appearing in publications, and have received recognitions and honors. They are often involved in State speeches, conventions, inaugural celebrations, and other opportunities designed to inspire, encourage, and educate. On occasion they are asked to specifically write poetry for a state event. Some famous National Poet Laureates include Tracy K. Smith, Billy Collins, Robert Penn Warren, Howard Nemerov, William Carlos Williams, and Elisabeth Bishop.

In North Dakota there has been a named Poet Laureate since 1957, including Corbin A Waldron. Henry R. Martinson and Lydia O. Jackson were named Associate Poet Laureates. Larry Woiwode was designated the ND Poet Laureate for life in 1985, and in 1995, Senate Concurrent Resolution 4039 was attached to the appointment for \$10,000 per biennium.

Mr. Woiwode passed away last spring, 37 years into his tenure. During 2004-2019 he named 12 Associate Poet Laureates. They are:

- Jamie Parsley –Fargo
- Rick Watson - Minot
- Dave Solheim - Dickinson, Bismarck
- Shadd Piehl - Minot, Mandan
- Madelyn Camrud – Grand Forks, Fargo
- Rick Watson – Mott, Minot
- Heid Erdrich – MN, Wahpeton
- Louise Erdrich – MN, Wahpeton
- Denise Lajimodiere - Belcourt
- Warren Sturlaugson - Bismarck
- Mark Vinz – Born ND, Moorhead

- Ron Vossler – Wishek, Grand Forks
- Bonnie Larson Staiger, Bismarck

NDCA strongly supports the post of a ND Poet Laureate; poetry uplifts us in so many ways. We would like to see this position be far-reaching and more available to all ND citizens. SCR 4002 resolves to name Denise Lajimodiere to this honorary position. At this time, naming a Native woman of such strong credentials and stature would be a very positive benefit to our state. As a current North Dakota Associate Poet Laureate, NDCA is fully in favor of this recommendation.

There is another bill forthcoming from Senator Krebsbach that addresses a term length and operational arrangements for the ND Poet Laureate designation. As the Council is currently the named agency responsible for Poet Laureate payments, we are in support of term limits and more structure related to this position. The best way to proceed would be to have a variety of qualified people fill this post for a set period of time, perhaps those already named as Associates... Our understanding is that Senator Mathern and the nominee agree that another bill can be passed to accomplish this.

Respectfully,



**Four States do not have a named Poet Laureate – Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania but do support individual Poets participating in a variety of activities on an ongoing basis.*