



Gov. Pritzker Announces 2020 Illinois Poet Laureate Search Committee

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Chicago – Governor Pritzker today announced the formation of the 2020 Illinois Poet Laureate Search Committee. The committee, which is comprised of poets, writers, and academics from across the state, will review nominations and recommend an Illinois resident to become the next state poet laureate, a position that has been vacant since late 2017.

“Illinois has been home to many talented poets like Carl Sandburg, Sandra Cisneros, and Gwendolyn Brooks who all used their words to inspire readers across the world,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “I look forward to hearing from the next generation of great writers and announcing the next Illinois Poet Laureate in the coming months.”

To commemorate the life of Illinois native John Prine and celebrate his writing and musical contributions, Governor Pritzker has proclaimed Prine an Honorary Poet Laureate of the state. The legendary singer-song writer, who was born in Maywood, passed away on April 7, 2020 after contracting COVID-19. Prine is the first to receive such an honorary designation.

“I have no doubt that John would be proud and delighted to receive this recognition from his home state of Illinois,” said Fiona Whelan Prine, wife of John Prine. “Although he had moved to Nashville in the early 1980’s, he continued to visit Chicago, and Maywood in particular, to spend time with his family. John continued to follow Chicago sports teams and had never found a hot dog, pizza or Italian Beef sandwich to rival the originals. Watching John, as I did many times, play to an Illinois audience was always thrilling. A home boy delighting in the love and approval of his loyal fans - some of them family, longtime friends, old school buddies and neighbors.”

Whelan Prine added, “John had a great respect for Writers of all kinds. He regarded Poets as being among those whose work carried weight, relevance and elevated craft. It is such an honor for me, our sons, and the entire Prine family to acknowledge that our

beloved John will be named an Honorary Poet Laureate of the State of Illinois. Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for this wonderful recognition.”

The first Illinois Poet Laureate, Howard B. Austin, was named in 1936. Only three other poets have held the title, Carl Sandburg (1962-67), Gwendolyn Brooks (1968-2000), and Kevin Stein (2003-2017). First Lady MK Pritzker will serve as the Honorary Chair and final judge in the selection process for the next Illinois Poet Laureate. Honorary Vice-Chair will be the Chairman of the Illinois Arts Council Shirley Madigan. The 2020 Search Committee members are:

- Nora Brooks Blakely, [Committee Chair](#), President of Brooks Permissions and daughter of Pulitzer Prize Winner Gwendolyn Brooks
- Dr. Ruben Quesada, Committee Vice-Chair, Poet, Founder of Latinx Writers Caucus, and Poetry Editor at AGNI
- Chris Aldana, Poet and Founder of Luya Poetry
- Tara Betts, Poet and Literary Editor at Newcity
- Kevin Coval, Poet, Artistic Director at Young Chicago Authors, and Co-Founder of the Louder Than a Bomb youth poetry festival
- Susan Dickson, Program Director at the Illinois Arts Council Agency
- Mark Eleveld, English Teacher at Joliet West High School, Professor of Philosophy at Lewis University, and Editor of The Spoken Word Revolution poetry books
- Kara Jackson, 2019 National Youth Poet Laureate and 2018 Youth Poet Laureate of Chicago
- Allison Joseph, Poet, Professor of English at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and Editor of Crab Orchard Review
- Greg McCormick, Executive Director of the Illinois State Library
- Kristin Runyon, English Teacher at Charleston High School
- Mark Turcotte, Poet and Senior Lecturer in English at DePaul University
- Sheila Walk, Executive Director of Springfield Area Arts Council

Nominations will be accepted from July 1, 2020 through August 15, 2020 via email or mail. Nominees must be current Illinois residents, have a publication history of poems and/or books, and an established history of activity in Illinois’ literary community.

Nominations may be emailed to IllinoisPoet2020@illinois.gov or mailed to:

*Illinois Poet Laureate Search Committee
c/o Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706*

A full description of the position qualifications and nominating requirements is available on the website of the Illinois Poet Laureate www.illinois.gov/poetlaureate. For more information or questions regarding the Illinois Poet Laureate nomination process and position, please contact: IllinoisPoet2020@illinois.gov.