



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
DISTRICT 2
File #: 22-023

Board Meeting Date: 1/11/2022

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Supervisor Carole Groom, District 2
Supervisor Warren Slocum, District 4
Subject: Extension of Term for San Mateo County Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution extending the term of Aileen Cassinetta to the honorary post of San Mateo County Poet Laureate for an additional six months from January 1, 2022 through June 30, 2022.

BACKGROUND:

The tradition of naming a Poet Laureate began in 17th century England when John Dryden was first named to the post. The United States Library of Congress appointed an official Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1937. In 1985, an Act of Congress changed the name of the position to Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

California was the first state to name a Poet Laureate informally and the position was established by the Legislature in 2001. A number of California counties and cities have followed suit and established the position of Poet Laureate, including the Bay Area counties of San Francisco, Marin, Napa, Sonoma, Alameda, Santa Clara and San Mateo.

In April 2013, the Board of Supervisors approved a resolution establishing the honorary post of San Mateo County Poet Laureate for the purpose of elevating poetry into the consciousness of San Mateo County residents and highlighting and celebrating the literary arts within our County.

On October 8, 2013, the Board of Supervisors approved a resolution naming Caroline Goodwin as our County's first Poet Laureate. Since that time, Lisa Rosenberg and Aileen Cassinetta have each been appointed successively to serve two-year terms as Poet Laureate. Aileen Cassinetta's term as the County's third Poet Laureate was approved by the Board of Supervisors to end on December 31, 2020. Subsequently, a one-year extension of term was approved by the Board to run from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021.

DISCUSSION:

The Poet Laureate represents San Mateo County and the art of poetry through outreach activities related to poetry; will propose and lead a community project throughout their term; will present appropriate works at a minimum of four selected County-sponsored events during the year, including events involving schools and youth; and will open the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors meetings with a poem every quarter.

Aileen Cassinetta began her two-year term as Poet Laureate of San Mateo County on January 1, 2019. In her first year, she visited 14 communities in the county, launched her “Speak Poetry” campaign, gave over 50 readings around the Bay Area, and promoted her events on tv, radio and print media. In April 2020, she curated the poem, “Love in the Time of COVID-19: A Community Poem for Healthcare Workers and Other Frontliners,” which gathered lines of hope and healing from San Mateo County residents and raised money for the San Mateo County Health Foundation’s COVID-19 fund. The poem was shared widely on social media, and was recited in Mystic, Connecticut on Memorial Day. She also organized a successful virtual book festival that featured over 50 authors, in collaboration with local libraries.

In January of 2021, after approval by the Board of Supervisors, Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta began a one-year extension of her term. The reasons for this extension were several. First - her work during this pandemic was and continues to be exemplary, as noted above, particularly her outreach to youth who experienced many months of distance learning beginning in March of 2021. Poet Laureate Cassinetta encouraged many school-age youth to write, create and even publish poems to help them to understand this pandemic. Furthermore, we believe that it is important to have continuity in this program during these most challenging times. The one-year extension this Poet Laureate’s term successfully achieved the committed outcome of her meaningful work in elevating poetry as a tool to use in combating stress in the time of Covid.

An additional six-month extension of the current Poet Laureate’s term is now needed to set in motion a process to find the county’s next Poet Laureate, to align the Poet Laureate program with the fiscal year cycle, and to allow Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta to continue offering much needed poetry events as a means to uplift our community during the ongoing pandemic.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the resolution as to form.

Approval of this Resolution contributes to the 2025 Shared Vision of a Collaborative Community by promoting the literary arts throughout the County, bringing poetry inside the classroom, to our libraries, and communities.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None