

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1279

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**As Passed House:**  
February 5, 2007

**Title:** An act relating to the state poet laureate.

**Brief Description:** Establishing the poet laureate program.

**Sponsors:** By House Committee on State Government & Tribal Affairs (originally sponsored by Representatives Skinner, Kessler, Lantz, Hasegawa, Dickerson, Haler, McIntire, Conway, Newhouse and Kenney).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 1/24/07, 1/26/07 [DPS].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/5/07, 90-5.

<p><b>Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishes a Washington State Poet Laureate Program.</li></ul>
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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Green, Kretz, McDermott, Miloscia and Ormsby.

**Staff:** Alison Hellberg (786-7152).

**Background:**

A poet laureate is a poet officially appointed by a government and expected to perform various duties such as composing poems for government events or promoting the appreciation of reading and writing poetry. Since the Middle Ages in England, the poet laureate has been the title given to the official poet of the monarch. Many former British colonies, such as

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Canada, South Africa, and the United States, appoint poets laureate. In the United States, many other states and cities do so.

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**Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The Legislature wishes to recognize:

- the value of poetry and the contribution Washington poets make to the culture of our state;
- that poetry is a literary form respected and growing throughout all segments of Washington's population;
- that awareness and appreciation of poetry encourages increased literacy and advanced communication skills; and
- that Washington has produced many excellent and nationally recognized poets.

The Washington State Arts Commission (Commission) shall establish and administer the Poet Laureate Program. A committee, appointed and coordinated by the Commission, will recommend a poet laureate for a two-year term. The Commission, with the approval of the Governor, makes the final selection. The poet laureate must be a published poet, a resident of Washington, active in the poetry community, and willing and able to promote poetry throughout the two-year term.

The poet laureate shall engage in activities to promote and encourage poetry within the state and shall receive compensation at a level determined by the Commission.

A nonappropriated poet laureate account is created in the custody of the State Treasurer. After the initial appropriation, the Commission shall fund the Poet Laureate Program through gifts, grants, or endowments from public or private sources

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**Appropriation:** The sum of \$30,000 is appropriated from the General Fund.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Students' creative use of language is important to educate, express, inform, and entertain. A poet laureate would promote this medium and be able to share words on special occasions for Washington. Washington needs to keep up culturally with the 40 other states that already have poets laureate.

Poetry teaches children and adults to treasure the beauty of language and have an opportunity to express feelings and emotions. Awareness and appreciation of poetry encourage increased literacy and advanced communication skills. Not all published poets would be effective as a

poet laureate. This program will require a unique set of skills and will seek out poets laureate that represent the diversity of the poetry and of the state's demographics. Students are deeply moved and brought alive by poetry. A Washington poet laureate would inspire future students.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Kessler, prime sponsor; Representatives Skinner and Lantz; Kris Tucker, Washington State Arts Commission; Karen Bonaudi, Paul Nelson, and Ed Stover, Washington Poets Association; Ted Lord, Humanities Washington; Michael Wieggers, Copper Canyon Press; and Jeffrey Youde, Quilcene High School.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.