

ADENA ISHII
MAYOR OF BERKELEY

CONSENT CALENDAR

June 17, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Mayor Adena Ishii (Author), Councilmember O'Keefe (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Lunaparra (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Taplin (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Relinquishment of Council Office Budget Funds from General Funds and Grant of Such Funds to the Poet Laureate Program for FY 2026

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution approving the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$500 per Councilmember, including \$500 from Mayor Ishii, to the Poet Laureate Program for FY 2026 with funds relinquished to the City's General Fund for this purpose from the discretionary Council Office Budgets of Mayor Ishii and any other Councilmembers who would like to contribute.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the City of Berkeley's first Poet Laureate was appointed prior to the City of Berkeley having a formal Poet Laureate selection process. The City of Berkeley's Poet Laureate Program was formalized as an open competitive process in 2023 as a joint program of the City and Berkeley Public Library. The Library provided funding for the Poet Laureate Program (\$3,000 selection panelist fees and \$10,000 stipend for the selected poet laureate total over two years), and the City's Civic Arts staff administered the selection process.

The Poet Laureate program was established to champion Berkeley's poetry, spoken word, and literary arts communities; honor a Berkeley poet to serve as a creative ambassador of the city; have the poet serve as an aesthetic voice and collaborator with the broader arts community; and provide mentorship to burgeoning literary artists. Over the course of a two-year service term, the Poet Laureate is required to complete an original poem inspired by or related to Berkeley, give at least two public readings, recite poems at City or Berkeley Public Library events, and act as mentor for Berkeley's Youth Poet Laureate, which is a program managed wholly by the Berkeley Public Library. The 2024-2025 Poet Laureate of Berkeley is Aya de León, a poet and the author of ten novels and the director of the Poetry for the People program at UC Berkeley. Aya's work has appeared in various venues, including Harper's Bazaar, Ebony, Def Poetry, and the New York Times. Aya is serving a two-year term from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2025 and has been actively engaged in the required Berkeley Poet Laureate duties.

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CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Because of a lack of the resources necessary to undertake the next Poet Laureate cycle (a two-year term from January 1, 2026 to December 31, 2027) the program will be discontinued at the end of the current Poet Laureate's term (December 31, 2025). The Library is unable to continue providing the program funding in 2026-2027. However, City staff in Civic Arts can administer the selection process for a one-year term if \$5,000 can be raised for the Poet Laureate stipend.

The relinquishment of funds from the respective discretionary Council Office Budgets of such members of the Berkeley City Council who wish to contribute will support this impactful program which champions poetry, spoken word and literary communities at a time when they are being federally defunded.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Up to \$500 is available from contributing Mayor's and Councilmembers' Council Office Budget discretionary accounts for a total of up to \$5,000

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with the subject of this report.

CONTACT PERSON

Mayor Adena Ishii

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Attachments:

1. Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

AUTHORIZING THE EXPENDITURE OF SURPLUS FUNDS FROM THE OFFICE
EXPENSE ACCOUNTS OF COUNCILMEMBERS FOR A GRANT TO SUPPORT THE
POET LAUREATE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, In 2017, the City of Berkeley's first Poet Laureate was appointed prior to the City of Berkeley having a formal Poet Laureate selection process.

WHEREAS, The City of Berkeley's Poet Laureate Program was formalized as an open competitive process in 2023 as a joint program of the City and Berkeley Public Library.

WHEREAS, The Poet Laureate program was established to champion Berkeley's poetry, spoken word, and literary arts communities; honor a Berkeley poet to serve as a creative ambassador of the city; have the poet serve as an aesthetic voice and collaborator with the broader arts community; and provide mentorship to burgeoning literary artists.

WHEREAS, the library can no longer financially support the Poet Laureate Program;

WHEREAS, additional funding will allow the program to continue for at least one more year;

WHEREAS, the provision of such funding aligns with the City of Berkeley's commitment to the arts, cultural equity, inclusion, and the celebration of diverse voices;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the City of Berkeley that funds relinquished by Councilmembers from their discretionary office budgets, up to \$500 per office, including \$500 from the Mayor, shall be authorized for expenditure from their D13 Discretionary Accounts to provide a Poet Laureate stipend.

