California has found its next poet laureate: Dana Gioia, a professor of poetry and public culture at the University of Southern California and former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Gov. Jerry Brown on Friday announced Gioia’s appointment as the state’s advocate for poetry and creative expression, who during a two-year term is required to perform public readings throughout the state and undertake a “significant cultural project” that brings poetry to students who might not otherwise be exposed to it. He follows Juan Felipe Herrera, who finished his term last year and was named the U.S. Poet Laureate in June.

“I believe that poetry is for everyone,” Gioia said in a statement. “It is not a remote or intellectual art. Poetry is our most concise, expressive, and memorable way of using words, and it can play a powerful role in schools and civic life. I am honored to become poetry’s public servant in California.”


From 2003 to 2009, Gioia led the National Endowment for the Arts, where he created the Poetry Out Loud recitation contest for high school students and launched a project to collect writings about the wartime experience from returning Afghanistan and Iraq veterans and their families. Gioia, a Republican, was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President George W. Bush in 2008.

The California Poet Laureate requires confirmation by the state Senate and receives an annual stipend of $5,000 from the California Arts Council.
Gov. Jerry Brown recently announced that award-winning poet Dana Gioia has been named California’s poet laureate. Gioia, who grew up in Southern California, has been the Judge Widney professor of poetry and public culture at the University of Southern California since 2011.

From 2003 to 2009, while he served as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Gioia launched several nationwide programs to expand public support for arts education, including the Poetry Out Loud contest, which more than 30,000 high school students participate in annually. Other arts initiatives led by Gioia include the Big Read program to encourage community reading and Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience to support returning troops and their families.

As poet laureate, Gioia will be tasked with spreading the art of poetry and inspiring an emerging generation of literary artists and enthusiasts.

Gioia said he hoped to visit counties statewide that have participated in Poetry Out Loud and to pay special attention to small and mid-size communities.

“My life changed for the better by falling in love with poetry,” he told the Associated Press. “It made me a better student, made me a more alert human being. And I’d like to try to bring the gifts of poetry to the broadest audience possible.”