



PRESS RELEASE

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April 29, 2024

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Howard County Executive Calvin Ball Introduces World-renowned Poet Truth Thomas, Howard County's Inaugural Poet Laureate

ELLCOTT CITY, MD – Howard County Executive Calvin Ball today announced Truth Thomas has been selected as Howard County's inaugural Poet Laureate. In honor of National Poetry Month, Ball made the announcement during the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society's (HoCoPoLitSo) Nightbird Reading at the 16th annual Blackbird Poetry Festival. Photos of the event can be seen [here](#). Video of the event can be viewed [here](#).

"We are incredibly fortunate to have such an active and vibrant literary arts community in Howard County. From our schools and gathering places, to our energized Downtowns and Main Streets, the arts are the heartbeat of our county, breathing life and meaning into our everyday lives," said Ball. "I am thrilled to have the talented, terrific, transformative Truth Thomas serve as Howard County's very first Poet Laureate. He brings a wealth of knowledge, experience, passion and creativity to this new role, and I am confident as Poet Laureate, he will elevate poetry in the consciousness of Howard County residents."

A singer-songwriter, poet and photographer born in Knoxville, Tennessee and raised in Washington, D.C., Thomas studied creative writing at Howard University and earned his Master of Fine Arts in poetry from New England College. The founder of Cherry Castle Publishing and creator of the "Skinny" poetry form, his collections include *Party of Black*, *A Day of Presence*, *Bottle of Life*, *Speak Water* and *My TV is Not the Boss of Me*. Winner of the 2013 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in Poetry, his poems have appeared in more than 150 publications including: *Callaloo*, *The Newtowner*, *New York Quarterly*, *The Emerson Review*, *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* and *The 100 Best African American Poems*. His work focuses largely on matters of race and social justice, both nationally and worldwide. A former writer-in-residence for the HoCoPoLitSo, Thomas is currently a member of the Society's Advisory Group.

"When I think about the blessing of being Howard County's inaugural Poet Laureate, I celebrate most the opportunity to serve others through the arts--to honor the human dignity of all people. That is my literary prayer, to follow in the giant steps of great poets who have preceded me in that quest and—hopefully—leave a loving path for others to follow," said Truth Thomas, Howard County's Poet Laureate.

Ball first [announced](#) the launch of the County's inaugural Poet Laureate program in partnership with the Howard County Arts Council and HoCoPoLitSo this past November. As the Howard

County Poet Laureate, Thomas will serve as an ambassador for poetry, literature and the arts and contribute to Howard County's poetic and literary legacy through public readings and participation in civic events. An honorary two-year position, Thomas will serve in this role from April 2024 through March 2026.

"I am delighted about Truth's appointment as Howard County's first Poet Laureate and look forward to working with him. Howard County has a proud history of influential poets and writers. Recognizing this, our inaugural Poet Laureate Review Panel emphasized the importance of the first appointee to be an exemplar for future poet laureates," said Coleen West, Executive Director, Howard County Arts Council. "With the appointment of Truth, County Executive Ball has set the bar high. As a poet, writer, teacher and musician, Truth has already inspired so many. There is great power in his words, and he has so many stories to tell. In his new role as Howard County Poet Laureate, I am confident that Truth will have a profound impact on our community and on the next generation of aspiring poets as well."

"HoCoPoLitSo celebrates the selection of Truth Thomas as the Inaugural Poet Laureate for Howard County and is grateful to County Executive Calvin Ball for embracing the role of the poet in public life. From its beginning, HoCoPoLitSo has sought to couple literary excellence with community engagement, to present authors whose revealing and penetrating work seeks to make a difference. Truth Thomas embodies HoCoPoLitSo's 50th Anniversary theme, 'Beyond Words, Beyond Borders,' and we look forward to the many opportunities ahead for him to bring his inspiring voice to the community," said Tara Hart, co-chair of HoCoPoLitSo Board of Directors.

Howard County Arts Council

The [Howard County Arts Council](#) was created in 1981 to serve the residents of Howard County by fostering the arts. The Arts Council is devoted to nurturing local artists and arts organizations, furthering the public's appreciation of the arts and ensuring that the arts are accessible to all, regardless of age, ability, or economic status.

In his proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget, Ball has included approximately \$1.25 million in funding for the Arts Council to support its operations and its administration of local artist grant programs. In October, during his [2023 State of the County address](#), Ball announced that the Arts Council would be relocating its headquarters to the historic Circuit Courthouse located atop Historic Ellicott City. Following a full renovation and restoration of the historic building, it will be reopened as a new Center for Arts, Culture, and History in Ellicott City.

HoCoPoLitSo

Founded in 1974 by National Book Award finalist Ellen Conroy Kennedy, Prudence Barry and Jean Moon, [HoCoPoLitSo](#) engages the community with the literary arts by hosting events, offering literary workshops and producing local readings, lectures and presentations with critically acclaimed writers, including Nobel Laureates, U.S. Poets Laureate, and Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winners.

HoCoPoLitSo also produces literary workshops for college and public school students, teachers, emerging writers and others. With support from Howard Community College's Dragon Digital TV, HoCoPoLitSo produces *The Writing Life*, an award-winning writer-to-writer interview show available on YouTube and Maryland community college stations. This year marks the 50th Anniversary celebration of the organization.

For more information contact Coleen West at coleen@hocoarts.org.

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The Howard County Arts Council is a non-profit organization whose mission is to serve the citizens of Howard County by fostering the arts, artists and arts organizations. The Howard County Arts Council receives major grants from the Howard County Government and the Maryland State Arts Council and sustaining annual support from corporate, foundation and individual sponsors. Howard County Arts Council offices are located at the Howard County Center for the Arts, 8510 High Ridge Road, Ellicott City, MD 21043. The Howard County Center for the Arts is an accessible facility encouraging the full participation of individuals with disabilities. For information, call (410) 313-2787 or email info@hocoarts.org. TDD: 711

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