

P R O C L A M A T I O N

WHEREAS, the Academy of American Poets established the month of April as National Poetry Month in 1996 to seek to highlight the extraordinary legacy and ongoing achievements of American poets, to introduce Americans to the pleasures and benefits of reading poetry, to bring poets and poetry to the public in immediate and innovative ways, and to make poetry an important part of our children's education; and

WHEREAS, in 2006, the City of Alexandria established the Alexandria Poet Laureate program as a way to publicly confirm the value of the literary arts as an essential part of the arts and humanities that affects every aspect of life in America today, including education, health, the economy, and community pride and development, and enhances the quality of life in Alexandria; and

WHEREAS, past Poets Laureate Mary McElveen, Amy Young, Tori Lane Kovarik, Ryan Wojanowski, Wendi R. Kaplan, and KaNikki Jakarta have served since the creation of the Poet Laureate Program; and

WHEREAS, Zeina Azzam, the first Arab American to hold the title, was appointed as Alexandria's Poet Laureate in 2022, and during her tenure wrote 23 original poems for the city including for the annual USA/Alexandria Birthday Celebration, DASHing Words in Motion, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Community Program, and Alexandria Jazz Festival and ALX Very Merry Jazz Fest; the 10th Anniversary of Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial; memorial events for the lynching of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas and the Soil Collection Ceremony commemorating their lives; Freedom House Reopening and Juneteenth Celebration; September 11 Remembrance Ceremony; and poems to celebrate the Torpedo Factory Art Center's 50th Anniversary and the installation ceremony for the Mayor and City Council; and poems to mark Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month; and

WHEREAS, Zeina Azzam led five themed writing workshops for the community; judged the youth poetry contests of Alexandria City Public Schools and the Poetry Society of Virginia, and the Heard Program's writing contest at the Alexandria Detention Center; delivered poetry sessions at Alexandria High School's International Academy, George Washington Middle School, and Francis C. Hammond Middle School; facilitated a poetry workshop for immigrants at the Campagna Center; organized a city-wide Haiku Contest and edited a published collection; hosted the annual "Poem in Your Pocket" community event; and created the annual "Multicultural Poetry Reading: Poems about the Moon"; and

WHEREAS, Zeina Azzam served as featured reader at a number of venues virtually, locally, and nationally including Alexandria's Beatley, Burke, Duncan, and Barrett libraries; Folger Shakespeare Theater, CityLit Baltimore Festival, and Islamic Relief USA; ACPS's annual poetry celebration; as well as George Mason, Georgetown, American, Towson, Southern Illinois, and Columbia universities and Vassar College; wrote articles about poetry for The Alexandria Times; gave interviews and readings at museums and print journals like the Museum of the Palestinian People and American Book Review, and media outlets WAMU, WPFW, Howard University TV, Virginia Center for Investigative Journalism; and

WHEREAS, during her tenure, Zeina Azzam released her book *Some Things Never Leave You* and published poems in journals and anthologies including *Writing the Land: Virginia*; *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume IX: Virginia*; *Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day*; and *the Knot Magazine*, which gave her a Pushcart Prize nomination; and her poem for the Alexandria Choral Society, "You Birth the Seeds, was arranged as a choral piece by renowned composer Melissa Dunphy; and

WHEREAS, Zeina Azzam's term as Poet Laureate for the City of Alexandria will expire on April 30, 2025.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ALYIA GASKINS, Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and on behalf of the Alexandria City Council, do hereby declare April 2025 as Poetry Month in Alexandria and acknowledge with sincere appreciation, the contributions of Zeina Azzam and thank her on behalf of the citizens of Alexandria for promoting poetry and the literary arts in our City, and for making poetry part of the fabric of life in the City of Alexandria.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City of Alexandria to be affixed this 22nd day of April 2025.

MAYOR ALYIA GASKINS
On behalf of the City Council
of Alexandria, Virginia

ATTEST:

Gloria A. Sitton, CMC City Clerk