



CHELLIE PINGREE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
1ST DISTRICT, MAINE

April 12, 2018

Chairman Jane Chu
National Endowment for the Arts
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Chairman Chu,

Following our recent conversation, I write today to express my disappointment in the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) decision to disallow my constituent Allan Monga from participating in this year's National Poetry Out Loud competition.

As you know, Allan is a student in good standing at Deering High School in Portland, Maine; he is also an asylum seeker who is lawfully present in the United States. As the winner of Maine's State Final, he has earned the opportunity to compete in the national competition set to take place later this month.

I greatly appreciate your willingness to discuss this issue with me as it has developed; as such, I know that Poetry Out Loud's longstanding criteria require that a participant be a citizen or a permanent legal resident. However, I am still not aware of any statutory grounds that would preclude Allan from participating. The NEA is also aware that he has received his Social Security number, which should resolve any ongoing concerns with transferring the monetary and travel awards associated with participation.

If there is an explicit statutory basis for the decision to bar Allan's participation in the competition, I ask that the NEA urgently provide that reasoning, given that the national competition is quickly approaching.

I know that we agree on the profound value of arts education – it empowers students to seek creative solutions, build meaningful relationships in their communities, and develop skills and interests that will enrich the rest of their lives. Allan embodies the spirit of those values and I sincerely hope that the NEA will find a way to allow his participation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chellie".

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress