



CITY OF NEW YORK
VOTER ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

For Immediate Release
Onida C. Mayers, VAC Director
212-442-8342 ocmayers@cityhall.nyc.gov

THE NEW YORK CITY VOTER ASSISTANCE COMMISSION AND URBAN WORD NEW YORK CITY ANNOUNCE THE RETURN OF THE NEW YORK CITY VOTER POET PROGRAM TO NAME THE 2010 NYC YOUTH POET LAUREATE

On November 6, 2010, at the historic Great Hall of Cooper Union, the New York City Voter Assistance Commission (VAC) with Deputy Mayor Dennis M. Walcott and Urban Word NYC will name the 2010 NYC YOUTH POET LAUREATE. Over 75 high school students, ages 16-19, students participated in four week workshops hosted on the City University of New York campuses and in community service projects throughout the city with the hopes of being named the New York City Youth Poet Laureate. A coveted title for one young person who has exemplary civic and community commitment while outperforming his/her peers in a voter-themed Poetry Slam.

“We believe that government has a role in cultivating the civic voice of the younger New Yorker” said Onida Coward Mayers, Executive Director NYC Voter Assistance Commission. “The non-partisan Youth Poet Laureate program allows these future leaders with an opportunity to find their own voice and passion while exploring the importance of civic involvement and voter participation.”

Last years’ winner 16 year-old Zora Howard was the cities first Youth Poet Laureate in a groundbreaking Voter Slam held at the Nuyorican Poets Café. This year the program has grown to include 2 semi-final slams, one on October 24th at the Bowery Poets Café, and the second on October 25th at the Nuyorican Poets Café.

The Final Voter Slam will be held in the historic Great Hall of Cooper Union on November 6th. “The Great Hall has seen the birth of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the women’s suffrage movement and the American Red Cross, as well as hosting a number of United States Presidents” said Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, “The 2010 NYC Youth Poet Laureate represents a new voice and passion toward civic engagement in New York City”.

“New York City is full of vibrant young poetics” said Michael Cirelli, Executive Director Urban Word, “Now we have the City of New York and the Voter Assistance Commission validating these young artists, and creating pathways for these poets to be honored because of the good work they do in their communities. The marriage of the arts and civic engagement presents the platform for a hopeful and optimistic future”.

The winner, like Zora before them, will serve as a youth advisor to the VAC Commission; participate in many citywide voter/civic themed nonpartisan events, such as a five borough library tour and the annual Poem in Pocket day. They will also have a book of poems published and of course hold the title of NYC Youth Poet Laureate for their term.

The NYC Voter Assistance Commission is proud to welcome AT&T and Con Edison as sponsors of the 2010 Youth Poet Laureate program providing opportunities for our younger New Yorkers to strengthen and develop their civic voice.

“AT&T is a big believer in the significance of the young person’s vote – and how critical it is as a catalyst for positive change,” said Hal Lenox, president of AT&T New York. “The Voter Assistance Commission and Urban Word NYC demonstrate their twin commitment to youth engagement on a daily basis – and AT&T applauds its good work.”

The NYC Voter Poet Slam is a joint project of the New York City Voter Assistance Commission (VAC) and Urban Word NYC. As part of the fifth annual Voter Awareness Month program, an annual citywide, nonpartisan community outreach campaign to promote voter registration, awareness and participation, the NYC Voter Poet Slam program was created to engage and celebrate youth voices. The Voter Assistance Commission and Urban Word NYC recognize that youth voice and community engagement are vital for increasing voter participation in the democratic process and empowering young people to effect positive changes in their communities and beyond.

The NYC Voter Assistance Commission is a nonpartisan government agency, established by a revision to the New York City Charter in 1988, dedicated to increasing voter participation in the democratic process by encouraging and facilitating voter registration and voting by all eligible United States citizens who are residents of New York City. Each October, VAC celebrates Youth Voter Education as part of its Voter Awareness Month initiatives. It is a citywide, nonpartisan campaign to stimulate greater voter awareness and participation in New York City municipal, state and federal elections.

Founded on the belief that teenagers can and must speak for themselves, Urban Word NYC (UW) has been at the forefront of the youth spoken word, poetry and hip-hop movements in New York City since 1999. UW presents literary arts education and youth development programs in the areas of creative writing, journalism, college prep, literature and hip-hop. UW works directly with 15,000 teens per year in New York City alone. Urban Word NYC believes that free self-expression - matured in an enhanced critical literacy environment - improves self-confidence and strengthens educational achievement for NYC’s inner-city youth. UW promotes active literacy, critical thought, and positive social dialogue across boundaries of age, race, class, gender, culture, and sexuality.

###



100 Gold Street • 2nd Floor • New York NY 10038-1605 • Tel: (212) 788-8384 • Fax: (212) 788-3298 • www.nyc.gov/voter