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**COMMISSION ON CULTURE & TOURISM ANNOUNCES
WINNER OF *POETRY OUT LOUD* STATE FINALS
*Erin Connolly of Rockville High School Voted State Champion;
Lila Kohrman-Glaser of Newtown High School Named Runner-up***

HARTFORD, Conn. (March 17, 2011) – Erin Connolly, a senior at Rockville High School in Vernon, was named champion of Connecticut's 6th Annual *Poetry Out Loud* State Finals competition on March 16 at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) in New Haven. The competition was presented by the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism (CCT), in partnership with the Institute Library and the Connecticut State Department of Education.

During the state finals, 29 contestants from high schools across the state recited works they selected from an anthology of more than 400 classic and contemporary poems. The 29 contestants were each named champion of his or her own school. As winner of the state competition, Connolly was awarded \$200, and \$500 was donated to Rockville High School for the purchase of poetry books. Lila Kohrman-Glaser, a senior at Newtown School, was voted runner-up and received \$100, plus \$200 was donated to her school library.

Among the top five finishers were also DeQuan Barnes, a junior at The Gilbert School (Winsted); Meghan Monk, a junior at Bolton High School; and Emily Owen, a senior at Branford High School.

Poetry Out Loud, a national program sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation, encourages high school students to learn about poetry through memorization, performance and competition. Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to the school-wide competition, then progress to the state finals and, ultimately, to the national finals in Washington, D.C. Additionally, as part of Connecticut's Poetry Out Loud program, CCT provided professional development for participating teachers in the fall; placed teaching artists in many of the participating schools; and offered an all-day School Champion workshop for school champions, first runner-ups and their teachers.

This year, more than 6,600 students across Connecticut participated in the program. "Last night's competition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of thousands of Connecticut students, their teachers, families and friends," said Randy Fiveash, CCT's Acting Executive Director, "it is wonderful to see poetry touch students in such a profound way."

Ms. Connolly will compete in the national finals in Washington D.C. April 27-29 where a total of \$50,000 in scholarship prizes and school stipends will be awarded, including \$20,000 for the Poetry Out Loud National Champion and \$10,000 and \$5,000 for the second- and third-place finalists. The remaining nine finalists each receive \$1,000 and the schools of the top 12 finalists each receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry books.

"Poetry Out Loud has given me a new appreciation for poetry," shared Connolly, "When you recite a poem you have to 'be' the poem. You have to feel what the poet felt when he or she wrote it, but more importantly you have to give the poem a voice – bring it alive. Poetry Out Loud brought poetry alive for me."

The evening was hosted by Tanya Wright, TV/film actor and director, and regular on HBO's *True Blood*. "What a wonderful event! I was honored to have been asked to share the POL's special day!" Wright shared, "I applaud and support all achievements in the arts, the noblest of professions. We had a great, enthusiastic audience and a hopping good time."

Judges at the Connecticut Poetry Out Loud State Finals were Randall Horton, Connecticut poet, Assistant Professor of English at the University of New Haven, and 2011 NEA Creative Writing Fellowship recipient; Amber Rose Johnson, 2010 National and Rhode Island POL Champion; Mimi Madden, Hill Stead Museum and Director of the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival; Monica Ong, new media artist and writer; John Stanizzi, poet, English teacher and former POL coordinator at Bacon Academy, Colchester; Larry Tomascak, Director of the Lyman Center for the Performing Arts at SCSU; and Elizabeth Cleary, Institute Library's Poetry Institute Coordinator (accuracy judge). Other distinguished guests included Dr. Ronald Herron, SCSU's Vice President of Student and University Affairs and Patricia Foley, Education Consultant, Bureau of Accountability and Improvement, Connecticut Department of Education.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

The NEA is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts — both new and established — bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, please visit www.nea.gov.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of Poetry magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the best poetry before the largest possible audiences. For more information, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org.

About the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism

The Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism brings together tourism, history and the arts. Its mission is to preserve and promote Connecticut's cultural and tourism assets in order to enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of the state. For more information, log on to www.cultureandtourism.org.

About the Institute Library

The Institute Library (founded 1826) in New Haven, Connecticut's oldest living literary institution and one of the last remaining membership libraries in North America. During much of the 1800s, the Library was a center of literary life, adult education, and social debate in New Haven. Since May 2008 the Institute Library has been home to the Poetry Institute which brings together poetry lovers from across the community to enjoy vibrant, exciting evenings of poetry with featured readers from a wide variety of poetic backgrounds.

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