



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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Library of Virginia to award honorary Patron of Letters degree to poet, lawyer and Freedom Reads founder Reginald Dwayne Betts

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA – The Library of Virginia announced today that poet and lawyer Reginald Dwayne Betts, founder and CEO of Freedom Reads, will be honored with the Library’s honorary Patron of Letters degree.

The Patron of Letters degree, granted by the Library Board, is the Library of Virginia’s highest honor. The honorary degree recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the fields of history, library science or archival science. The 2024 honoree has distinguished himself through his efforts to promote libraries and literacy.

“Dwayne Betts is a powerful example of how literature and access to libraries can transform lives,” said C. Paul Brockwell Jr., chair of the Library Board. “We are honored to celebrate his work to increase access to literature and the many individuals who will be inspired by libraries he’s established.”

Betts, who was sentenced as an adult in Virginia to nine years in prison at age 16, founded the nonprofit Freedom Reads to empower people in prison through literature to imagine new possibilities for their lives. Freedom Reads has transformed prisoners’ access to literature by opening more than 300 Freedom Libraries in prisons nationwide. Fifty-six of the Freedom Libraries are located in Virginia prisons.

"The Virginia Department of Corrections greatly appreciates the Freedom Libraries donated by Reginald Dwayne Betts," said VADOC director Chad Dotson. "Reading can unlock newfound passions, provide endless amounts of knowledge, and inspire our inmate population. In turn, this helps the VADOC achieve its mission of providing effective incarceration, supervision and evidence-based re-entry services."

A Yale Law School graduate and 2021 MacArthur Fellow, Betts has also authored numerous works exploring the world of prison and the effects of violence and incarceration on American society. His books include his latest work, “Redaction,” a collaboration with Titus Kaphar; three works of poetry; and his memoir, “A Question of Freedom.” In 2019, Betts won the National Magazine Award in the Essays and Criticism category for “Getting Out,” his “New York Times Magazine” essay that chronicles his journey from prison to becoming a licensed attorney.

The Library will present Betts with an honorary degree during the 27th Annual Virginia Literary Awards Celebration on Sept. 21, 2024. Tickets can be purchased at www.lvafoundation.org/tickets.

The Virginia Literary Awards, presented by Dominion Energy, honor Virginia writers and celebrate their contributions to the literary landscape of the Commonwealth and the country. The awards — given in the categories of poetry, fiction, nonfiction and children’s literature — are presented at the annual awards celebration, which has become the Library's signature event and an eagerly anticipated cultural tradition in Richmond. For more information about the Virginia Literary Awards, visit www.lvafoundation.org/literaryawards.

ABOUT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

The Library of Virginia is the state’s oldest institution dedicated to the preservation of Virginia’s history and culture. Our online offerings attract nearly 4 million website visits per year, and our resources, exhibitions and events bring in nearly 100,000 visitors each year. The Library’s collections, containing more than 130 million items, document and illustrate the lives of both famous Virginians and ordinary citizens. The Library is located in downtown Richmond near Capitol Square at 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Learn more at www.lva.virginia.gov

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