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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 4, 2024

CITY OF URBANA ANNOUNCES THE 2024 URBANA POET LAUREATE - RUBY MENDENHALL

The City of Urbana and the Urbana Arts & Culture Program are proud to announce the fourth Poet Laureate in City of Urbana history, Ruby Mendenhall.

Ruby Mendenhall is a Professor of Sociology, African American Studies, Urban and Regional Planning, Gender and Women's Studies and Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is an Associate Dean for Diversity and Democratization of Health Innovation at the Carle Illinois College of Medicine. She is also an affiliate of the Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology; Women and Gender in Global Perspectives; the Cline Center for Advanced Social Research; Epstein Health Law and Policy Program; Family Law and Policy Program; the Institute of Government and Public Affairs; the Cancer Center at Illinois and the Institute for Computing in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. Mendenhall's research examines how living in racially segregated neighborhoods with high levels of violence affects Black mothers' mental and physical health using surveys, interviews, crime statistics, police records, data from 911 calls, art, wearable sensors and genomic analysis. She also examines Black mother's resiliency and spirituality. She is currently directing the STEM Illinois Nobel Project, which provides unprecedented access to STEAM fields. She is currently co-directing the Youth Wellness Project that trains youth Community Health Workers and Citizen Scientists. Mendenhall has written over a hundred poems, including one co-authored with the former 2022 Urbana Poet Laureate Ashanti Files titled "From Racism to Renaissance.

Mendenhall was selected through a competitive application process by a panel of literary experts. The poet laureate receives a \$2,000 honorarium for the one-year term, funded by the City of Urbana's Arts and Culture Program. The jury was drawn to Ruby Mendenhall's proposal due to her poetry submissions, strong project proposal to publish an intergenerational book of poetry, as well as her adeptness in merging her interdisciplinary academic research with vital youth and community wellness programs.

The City of Urbana and the Urbana Arts and Culture Program invite the public to Ruby Mendenhall's Poet Laureate Celebration from 6 to 8 p.m., Friday, March 15, 2024, at Gallery Art Bar in Downtown Urbana. For more information, contact Vivian Krishnan with the City of Urbana at vlkrishnan@urbanaininois.us.

For more information about the City of Urbana, please visit www.urbanaininois.us

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