

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 92

WHEREAS, Benjamin Alire Sáenz of El Paso has been named the recipient of the 2023 Texas Medal of Arts Award for the Literary Arts by the Texas Cultural Trust; and

WHEREAS, An acclaimed poet, novelist, and children's author, Benjamin Sáenz was born in New Mexico to a family with strong West Texas roots; his passions for learning and social justice led him to join the Catholic clergy, and he completed his bachelor's degree in humanities and philosophy at St. Thomas Seminary in Colorado and studied theology at the University of Louvain in Belgium; three years as a parish priest in El Paso taught him that his real calling was the literary life; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sáenz waited tables for a time to save up for graduate school; after earning a master's degree in creative writing from The University of Texas at El Paso, he embarked on fellowships at the University of Iowa and Stanford University; his first collection of poems, *Calendar of Dust*, received the American Book Award; in 1994, he returned to his beloved El Paso, joining the faculty of his alma mater and eventually becoming chair of the UTEP bilingual master of fine arts creative writing program; and

WHEREAS, Uncommonly prolific, Mr. Sáenz has produced a wide-ranging body of work, including six volumes of poetry, four novels, two collections of short stories, four bilingual children's books, and five young adult novels; teachers across the country value his writing for its powerful representation of the Latino youth experience, and his coming-of-age love story, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, became an international bestseller; translated into two dozen

languages, it has won nearly 30 literary awards, and a movie version premiered at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival; the book landed on the New York Times Bestseller List a decade after its first publication, and its sequel debuted at the top of the list; his many honors include the Texas Book Award and the Lon Tinkle Award for Lifetime Achievement, the highest conferred by the Texas Institute of Letters; in addition, he was the first Latino and first Texan to receive the prestigious national PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Sáenz has touched the hearts and stirred the imaginations of innumerable people through writing that is at once deeply personal, broadly human, and richly expressive of the ambiguities of the borderlands; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 88th Legislature, hereby congratulate Benjamin Alire Sáenz on his receipt of the 2023 Texas Medal of Arts Award for the Literary Arts from the Texas Cultural Trust and extend to him sincere best wishes for the future; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That an official copy of this Resolution be prepared for Mr. Sáenz as an expression of high regard from the Texas Senate.

Blanco

President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on January 24, 2023.

Secretary of the Senate

Member, Texas Senate