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Nobel Prize winner calls poet Amiri Baraka 'unworthy' of top poet position

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Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel urged state lawmakers to eliminate the state's top poet position because Amiri Baraka is "unworthy of the honor."

"He is an embarrassment to your state by spreading in his public statements poisonous slander of the Jewish people, its history and aspirations," Wiesel wrote in a letter to the **Anti-Defamation League**.

Baraka has been criticized for a poem that implied Israel had advance knowledge of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Under current rules, state officials can't fire Baraka. The poet has refused to step down and said he is not anti-Semitic.

On Monday, about 16 members and supporters of the Anti-Defamation League spoke at a State House press conference asking lawmakers to speed passage of the bill to eliminate the poet position.

The Rev. Otis Bowden, pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Piscataway, said Baraka is not suited to the job.

"We should have someone who brings us together, not tears us apart," said Bowden, a member of the Black Ministers Council.

The Senate has passed a bill that would eliminate the poet laureate post. The Assembly has not yet considered the legislation.