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New Jersey Assembly Votes To Cut Embattled Poet's Job

By LAURA MANSNERUS

TRENTON, July 1— The New Jersey General Assembly approved a measure today to eliminate the post of state poet laureate. The legislation would effectively remove the poet, Amiri Baraka, who had caused a furor with his poem referring to the 9/11 attacks.

The 69-to-2 vote sends the bill to Gov. James E. McGreevey, who has vigorously denounced Mr. Baraka for the poem, which suggests that Israelis knew about the terrorist plot in advance.

In the uproar that followed Mr. Baraka's public reading of the poem last fall, Mr. McGreevey asked him to resign. When he refused, and the governor learned that he had no authority to dismiss the poet laureate, legislators gathered dozens of sponsors for the bill abolishing the post.

The State Senate approved the measure in January with 21 votes, the minimum needed for passage, after a debate in which some expressed concerns about censorship. The other 19 senators abstained.

The two dissenting votes today were cast by Assemblymen William D. Payne and Donald Tucker, both of Newark. Mr. Baraka is a longtime resident of Newark, and while he was under attack in Trenton, he was named poet laureate of the Newark public school system.

Under the name LeRoi Jones, Mr. Baraka, who is black, wrote an autobiography, in addition to poems and essays growing out of his experience during Newark's racial turmoil in the 1960's.

Shai Goldstein, the regional director of the New Jersey office of the Anti-Defamation League, said today that Mr. Baraka did not have strong support among blacks. Mr. Goldstein said that 4 of the original 16 sponsors of the bill were African-American, and that the Black Ministers' Council of New Jersey was one of the first groups to support it. "It's all part of the ongoing process of confronting those who engage in bigoted behavior," he said.

Mr. Baraka did not return a telephone call today asking for comment. In February, he told The New York Times in an interview, "Everything that was flowing into my mind at the time flowed into the poem.

"I can understand people being excited and outraged, but the point is that you have to investigate."

Governor McGreevey froze the \$10,000 stipend for the two-year appointment, which expires in August 2004. But Mr. Baraka has demanded payment of the money.