

Testimony: Vermont Senate Committee on Education
S. 220, An act relating to Vermont's public libraries

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Good afternoon Chairperson Campion, Vice Chair Gulick and members of the Senate Committee on Education. We are grateful for the opportunity to be here again to share our thoughts in support of Senator Gulick's amendment to S. 220.

The Vermont School Library Association (VSLA) has been in support of H.807, Representative Farlice-Rubio's bill, "An act relating to a school library material selection policy." In the same way that section 3 of S.220 addresses selection and retention of library materials for public libraries, the language of this amendment requires all Vermont school districts to have a library materials selection policy in order to protect students' First Amendment rights, protect school staff and administration from legal action, and provide equitable library services for all students.

In the current climate of book bans happening throughout the nation, it is of the utmost importance that all Vermont schools have robust material selection policies and policies for challenged materials. A 2022 VSLA membership survey showed that only 46% of districts had an updated library materials selection policy and only 32% had an updated policy for challenged materials, both of which are essential in protecting student's First Amendment rights.

Over the past several years the VSLA has worked with the Vermont School Board Association to update and clarify model policy related to library collections. This work resulted in a new policy, "D22 Selection of Library Materials" which is now considered a recommended policy by the VSBA. We are proud of the work that was accomplished and the new policy which states that it exists to "... provides access to a diverse library collection... that **sustains students' First Amendment Rights to access information and to read freely**". The new model policy also calls on superintendents to create procedures that address the selection, deselection, donations of, and reconsideration of materials.

The VSLA believes that these policies should be required, and not just recommended. Our partners at VSBA let us know that this would require legislative action. In an effort to move the VSBA policy into the required category, our Advocacy and Professional concerns co-chair, and retired Vermont school librarian extraordinaire, Kate Davie approached her Representative Farlice-Rubio about creating legislation that would require schools to adopt a material selection policy. In this work we considered models of legislation presented in other states, and the needs of our Vermont schools. This work became H.807 and is the language of the amendment to S.220 that you are considering today.

We know the importance of local control to our educational system, and we think that that language of this amendment best reflects that. It does not require a specific policy (although a model does exist from VSBA), but leaves it up to our school boards to create their own within the guidelines of the amendment.

As you already know, schools are required to have certified librarians as part of the Educational Quality Standards. This amendment would not require any additional staff or funding on the part of districts.

We thank you for your support of Vermont libraries and would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Vermont School Library Association Executive Board

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