

## Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

### Re: Proposed Changes to the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont

Catherine Delneo, State Librarian and Commissioner of the Department of Libraries

March 15, 2023

The miscellaneous bill under consideration by the Senate Committee on Education would add the following language to the scope of the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont:

“whether current law provides adequate protections for libraries from firearm violence” to the scope of the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont.

“specific and detailed findings and proposals concerning the issues set forth in subsection (c) of this section, including recommendations for legislative action regarding firearm and weapon safety on library property;”

[W~Beth St. James~DR 23-0909, Draft 4.1, 3-2-2023~3-2-2023.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)

It is very important to the Department of Libraries that all Vermonters feel safe when visiting libraries just as they should feel safe when visiting schools, city halls, and other civic spaces.

To my knowledge, specific threats of firearm violence have not been brought to the attention of either the Working Group or the Department of Libraries in the past year. The Department of Libraries does not track incidents of violence or threats of violence in Vermont’s libraries and is not aware of any such data set collected by another department or agency of the state.

While libraries throughout the state might benefit from consideration of firearm and weapon safety on library property, the Department respectfully suggests that the specific topic of adequate protections from firearm violence in libraries might fit well within a broader consideration of firearm violence in all public buildings. The Department suggests that the topic of firearm violence in civic spaces, including libraries, be considered by other bodies better equipped to evaluate threats of firearm violence in public spaces and better equipped to develop recommendations to the Legislature on the specific threat of firearm violence in civic spaces. The Department suggests that all public, school, academic, and special libraries be included in any legal protections provided to other civic spaces where people congregate so that everyone in our state can visit their library without fear of violence of any kind – including firearm violence.

That said, the *broader* topic of public and staff safety in libraries *has* been raised to the Department, the Working Group, and in trainings for and emails on a library staff listserv administered by the department. The broader topic of safety in libraries is important and is a topic that the Working Group should include in its study and report. While the Department does not have specific data at our disposal, the Working Group can certainly solicit comments from the public, library staff, and trustees on this topic that would be valuable for making recommendations in our final report.

For that reason, I respectfully request that the Committee consider the addition of the broader topic of public and staff safety in libraries to the charge of the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont through revision of the miscellaneous bill, rather than adding language to the Working Group's charge that is tightly focused on firearm safety.

I also suggest that when developing future legislation on safety in library spaces, the language used in legislation include *all* public, school, academic, and special libraries, not just those libraries housed in municipally owned buildings. This will ensure that patrons and staff of all libraries in Vermont are afforded the same protections under the law that are provided to patrons and staff of libraries housed in municipally owned buildings.

Finally, given this addition to the already expansive scope of the Working Group on the Status of Libraries, I request that the deadline of the Working Group's report to the Senate and House Committees on Education be extended to March 1, 2024. This extension would provide the Department of Libraries with additional time to administer some of the additional surveys requested by the Working Group and to include 2022 data in its report.