

**Testimony to Senate Committee on Education in support of S303  
Feb. 8, 2024 - Joan Gamble, Strategic Change Consultant**

I'm Joan Gamble, Strategic Change Consultant and Champion of the Imagination Library at the Rutland Free Library. I'm honored to testify in favor of S. 303, especially in front of two Senators from Rutland County, Senator Weeks and Senator Williams.

I first learned about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, or DPIL, in December 2020, when I read an article about an Imagination Library program in Brandon. My first reaction was 'Brandon, what about Rutland?'. I spoke with Kyle Hutchins, who started the Brandon program during his paternity leave after learning his baby was not eligible to participate.

As a Strategic Change Consultant who works with nonprofits, I knew the questions to ask before starting a new program, the same questions you should ask as you consider this bill. Is there a need? Is this program the best way to fill the need? Are there others filling this need? What does it take to run the program?

After extensive due diligence about the DPIL, it became clear to me that this was an evidence-based program that would cost-effectively address literacy issues. Investing in early literacy is the key to addressing overall literacy problems, since 90% of brain development occurs in the first three years of a child's life. The logic model supporting DPIL shows kindergarten readiness is a key outcome of the program.

DPIL has a database of 39 research reports on their website [imaginationlibrary.com](http://imaginationlibrary.com) showing that kindergarten readiness affects children, especially at-risk children, in the long-term. A study by the Arkansas Department of Education tracked children who participated in the Imagination Library vs. those who did not participate, and participating children not only showed a 29% increase in kindergarten readiness, but also significantly stronger reading skills and higher reading achievement test scores over their non-participating peers consistently from kindergarten through third grade. The Kansas Emporia School District followed participating and non-participating children and showed consistently higher performance through 9th grade.

In talking with education and social service agencies, it became apparent that there was no other organization filling this need in the Rutland area. My next step

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was to figure out what it really takes to run a local program. DPIL has a detailed handbook of what's needed to run the program. In addition, people running other local affiliates, like Nicole Campbell, who runs Shire Kids serving Bennington County and is also testifying today, were a tremendous help.

To start a program, you need to partner with a local 501c3, library or school to get access to the bulk mailing rate. I chose the Rutland Free Library as a partner to serve the five towns in their catchment area: Rutland City, Rutland Town, Mendon, Tinmouth and Ira.

In order to start a program, the local affiliate needs to raise funds to cover at least the first 6 months of operating the program. I gave numerous presentations to local organizations showing how cost effective it was due to the economies of scale provided by partnering with the Dolly Parton Foundation. As a result, I was able to enlist the support the United Way of Rutland County, two local Rotary Clubs, and sustaining support from Rutland City Schools, who use Federal monies to reimburse us the of cost of mailing books to participating children in Rutland City every month.

Since we began mailing books in April 2021, we've mailed 12,507 free books to children in Rutland City, Rutland Town, Mendon, Tinmouth, and Ira. We are currently mailing free books to 460 children every month!

Our dedicated team of volunteers is focused on getting ALL children under 5 in the five towns we serve to participate, especially at-risk children. This requires ongoing marketing efforts, since every month children "graduate" on their fifth birthday, so we need to keep finding new children. We promote our program through an ongoing marketing effort via Facebook, newspaper articles, being visible at local events like National Night Out, local public access television and by partnering with local agencies like the birthing center at Rutland Regional Medical Center, local pediatric offices, schools and local daycares. We especially focus our efforts on getting at-risk children to participate by encouraging agencies like DCF, the Parent Child Center, and Head Start, to sign up children. We pay extra to have the post office mail us undelivered books and then collaborate with the Rutland Homeless Prevention Center to give children experiencing homelessness free books, since they do not have an address for us to mail the books.

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I enthusiastically support S 303, and the effort to bring the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to all children under 5 in the state. The Dollywood Foundation partnership makes the program incredibly cost-effective and easy to administer to achieve evidence-based results.

Thank you

