

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: Written testimony for August 27th/28th FY2021 budget hearing from the Vermont Library Association

Dear Committees on Appropriations:

The Vermont Library Association represents our state's diverse array of public, school, academic, and special libraries. These libraries collectively employ more than 2,000 Vermonters and welcome more than 5,000,000 visits through our doors and online every year. Libraries are the most visited cultural institution in the nation according to a 2019 Gallup Poll, outpacing visits to the movies, their next closest competitor, more than 2 to 1. (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/284009/library-visits-outpaced-trips-movies-2019.aspx>)

First, we understand this is a challenging budget environment for the State, and are pleased to see that the Department of Libraries received only the same 3-5% cut to its operating budget that was in line with other state departments. Libraries in Vermont rely on the Department of Libraries to provide

- services to those with disabilities;
- training and support for daily operations;
- specialized reference services;
- online eBook and article databases;
- courier service support and interlibrary loan services

The Department of Libraries provides a lot of value for their small state allocation! They receive matching federal funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that extend the value (and would be lost if budget cuts become too severe). While we know that all State departments expect to be impacted by a lean budget year, **we ask that cuts to this vital department remain in line with those in other departments, and that any cuts are restored once budgets become more robust in the future.**

Second, libraries across Vermont are beginning to feel the impact of Covid-related budget cuts at all levels. Schools, colleges and universities, public libraries, and even medical libraries are already being asked to make cuts from their parent organizations, and there is an expectation that things will get worse before they get better. **We implore the legislature to direct a reasonable amount of current and future federal Covid relief funds to libraries in order to keep them strong during these lean times.** In our last recession of the late 2000's, libraries saw a double-digit increase in usage even as they saw their budgets slashed. People were looking for low-cost options for accessing information and entertainment, and libraries struggled to keep up with the demand. Many libraries were just starting to recover their previous budgetary levels when the pandemic hit.

In closing, the Vermont Library Association would welcome any questions, suggestions, or partnership opportunities as we work together to keep Vermont libraries serving Vermonters now and far into the future.

Sincerely,

Vermont Library Association Executive Board and Government Relations Committee

Kevin Unrath, VLA President (Library Director, Shelburne)
Amy Olsen, VLA Past President (Library Director, Hyde Park)
Mike Roy, VLA Vice President (Library Director, Middlebury College)
Maria Schumkal, VLA Secretary (Library Director, Warren)
Margaret Woodruff, VLA Government Relations Chair (Library Director, Charlotte)
Emer Feeney, VLA Government Relations Vice-Chair (Assistant Director, Burlington)

