

Almy Landauer
Testimony for House General and Housing Committee
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My name is Almy Landauer. I have been a librarian since 2007. I have been working at the South Burlington Public Library since 2021. I hold a Master's Degree and the Vermont Certificate of Public Librarianship.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

And thank you to the VT Senate and House for working on S102 that will expand human and workers rights in the state.

I would like to describe to you why the decision to join a union was important to us at the SBPL in order to secure equitable treatment, and how we went about doing that.

I work full time as the Adult Services Specialist at the SBPL. At 23k residents, SB is the second largest city in VT, and SBPL is one of the larger libraries in the state with 7 part time, 9 full time, and 5 substitute employees. The Library has grown remarkably busier since moving into a new building in SB's new City Center 2.5 years ago, and we provide critical services to all residents and visitors, including the entire gamut of diverse residents and visitors within our urban-suburban community.

When I was hired in 2021 I noted that my job description said "non-union". Over the course of time I picked up on the fact that the other City of SB employees did belong to a union. I asked a few library staff who have been there many years if they knew why we were not included. The answers ranged from, we've just never been, or the former director told us we get all the same benefits and pay as the unionized city employees anyway, or out of sight out of mind (located in the SB high school.)

Around the same time I started at SBPL, a new City manager came on board in SB. Fairly early in her tenure, she decided to make a one time improvement to the hourly wages of library staff in order to reduce the pay gap that had been allowed to grow between the library staff and the unionized city staff. Other benefits were not addressed or increased, only pay rates, and I believe those adjustments varied by position. While this was good news for most library staff it also highlighted that whatever pay and benefits we received were subject to the whim of the city manager - some years could be yes, others could be no, and this differed from the stabilizing and dependable annual COLA and longevity increases all other city employees receive as agreed to in the labor contract.

Out of curiosity I located the SB City/union contract on the HR portal.

I learned from the contract, as well as from my personal experiences and experiences shared with me by other library staff, that in fact library staff were not receiving the same benefits, pay or job security, and thus were not being treated equitably. This was clearly unjustified and disturbing, especially because library staff is almost all female and our salaries and benefits had long been suppressed - that 83 cents on the dollar gender gap came to life. So in May of 2023 I reached out to AFSCME to see if there was a way for Library staff to be included in the SB City employee union contract.

After an educational conversation with the AFSCME representative during which I asked a lot of questions, I shared the info I'd gathered with a few other library staff members. These conversations revealed significant low morale and discontent with current conditions. This small group met again with the AFSCME Rep. to ask questions and better understand how the process works. We decided it was time to start talking with all staff about the possibility of joining the union.

This initial group of staff called a meeting to which all staff and the VT AFSCME Representative were invited. During the meeting we reviewed the process of unionizing, the dues, and possible timelines, and everyone had the opportunity to ask any questions. There was discussion about issues at the Library and how we might start to address those. Towards the end of the meeting, during which many expressed support for the idea of library staff joining the union, union cards were available to sign there or to take home and decide later.

A solid majority of those at the meeting chose to sign cards that day. Several others, including some staff who were hired between this meeting and now, signed cards later. Those who chose not to sign cards have remained valued and respected colleagues and their decisions are honored. There was and is no discrimination against them or their work positions as we bargained. If they changed their minds they would be very welcome to join. No pressure has been applied by anyone to do so. The three staff members who did not join work limited part time hours.

Library union membership now accounts for 13 out of 16 eligible library employees (with one eligible library position currently unfilled.)

Other steps naturally followed, starting with declaring our intention to join the union. Next was requesting voluntary recognition from the City. That step turned out to involve a lengthy period of negotiating with much back and forth with the City about who was to be eligible. During this process, a crucial meeting was requested with the City to discuss a variety of workplace issues including pay for the three library staff which the City deemed ineligible to join the union. This proved productive. Once that process

concluded, eligible library staff met to collectively decide on our needs, wants and bargaining priorities. And finally, we began negotiating our first agreement with the City at the bargaining table.

In early April the Library staff and the City bargaining team reached a tentative agreement. The library staff unanimously ratified the Tentative Agreement on April 17, and the SB City Council will vote on it in May.

So it has been just about a year of effort which we hope will be concluded next month. We are looking forward to a more equitable workplace for the SB Public Library staff. Having helped lead staff through this process, I am wholly convinced that card check elections are an important avenue for improving quality of life, equity and a productive and cared for workforce. Using card check as described in S102 to gain the right to join or create a union should significantly decrease unnecessary delays and increase the respect and agency due to employees.

Thank you.