

House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs
Vermont General Assembly
2023-2024 Regular Session

April 24, 2024

EveryLibrary Institute
6433 Fairfield Ave
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To the Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair, and Committee Members:

Thank you for conducting a hearing on S.220, as amended, an act relating to the governance and policies of Vermont public libraries. My organization, the EveryLibrary Institute, is a national public policy organization with a network in Vermont and across the country. We were proud to provide testimony to the Working Group on the Future of Libraries, which produced the framework of S.220. Today, we write to endorse S.220 and encourage its favorable passage by the Committee.

S.220 represents a vital step forward in the effort to combat the rising tide of censorship and discrimination that threatens the right to read in our communities, particularly affecting LGBTQ+ and BIPOC readers. At a time when book bans and restrictive policies are increasingly being used as tools for discrimination, this bill serves as a crucial defense by reinforcing First Amendment protections and integrating libraries within the scope of state public accommodation laws.

Vermont's public accommodations laws are essential civil rights statutes that prohibit discrimination in public spaces, including protected classes based on race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Collection development is a core component of library services. By extending these protections to include the right to access a diverse range of viewpoints without fear of censorship, S.220 protects individual freedoms and affirms a collective commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. While professional librarians make collection development choices that are inclusive and diverse, this ethical framework is notable but also voluntary. In many places around the country facing pressure to censor books, would-be book banners often cite their personal discomfort with a title as the reason it must be removed from general circulation. By ensuring that collection development policies include titles that are relevant to minority groups, the discomfort of the majority cannot drive discrimination against the reading interests of protected classes.

In addition to key provisions that require public libraries to adopt policies compliant with the First Amendment and public accommodation laws, S.220 contains several important elements that we also endorse. S.220 would update privacy measures to protect the confidentiality of library records for minors, respecting family rights while safeguarding youth privacy. This realignment will ensure that at-risk youth can exercise their right to read. Likewise, the provisions that

strengthen library governance by delineating the responsibilities of library trustees will enhance the effectiveness of library management and operations.

As libraries face nationwide increases in censorship attempts, S.220 will act as a defense against regressive actions. Thank you for considering this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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