



S.220: An Act Relating to Vermont's Public Libraries
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The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence supports the provisions in Section 3 of S.220 that expand library patron confidentiality protections to children who are 12 years and older. For many youths, access to library resources is an issue of health and safety. Youth in our communities may rely on libraries to access accurate information on issues such as reproductive health, gender expression, sexual orientation, sexual abuse, or domestic and family violence.

Many youths have parents or guardians who will support their information access needs, but this is not always the case. In our work with youth survivors of violence, we are acutely aware of the difficult reality that family members can often be the perpetrators of violence. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that of all victims of sexual abuse under the age of 18, two out of three are ages 12 to 17 and that in cases of child sexual abuse reported to law enforcement, 93% of perpetrators are known to the victim and 34% are family members.¹

We want Vermont youth in these heartbreaking situations to have safe, anonymous places where they can turn for reliable information about what they are experiencing, to make it clear that they are not alone. This information could include the discovery of local services, including those of our member organizations. In 2022, the Vermont Network's member organizations served nearly 200 child survivors of sexual abuse and nearly 1000 children impacted by domestic violence.²

Even youth with supportive parents may be deterred from seeking out information due to stigma or shame in the absence of confidentiality assurances. Libraries specialize in providing access to reliable, evidence-based information. Without these provisions, youth may turn to far less accurate or appropriate sources of information. We have many precedents in Vermont law for balancing youth health and safety imperatives with parental rights. This should be one of those instances. We urge you to support these important protections for Vermont youth.

¹ RAINN, "Children and Teens: Statistics," n.d., <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>.

² Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, "2022 Data Snapshot," 2022, <https://www.vtnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Vermont-Network-Data-Snapshot-2022.pdf>.