

Testimony: House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, S.220, An act relating to Vermont's public libraries.

Good day Chairperson McCarthy, Vice Chair Birong, and members of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to be here to share the Vermont Library Association's support for S.220.

My name is Oceana Wilson. I have been a librarian in Vermont for twenty-three years. I am the President of the Vermont Library Association and the Dean of the Library at Bennington College. The Vermont Library Association (VLA) is a professional organization for all of Vermont's public and academic librarians. Our mission is to develop, promote, and improve library and information services and librarianship in the state of Vermont. I'm delighted to be here today with my colleague Mary Danko, who will also be providing testimony on behalf of VLA.

The Vermont Library Association strongly supports:

- The amendment of **Sec. 2. 22 V.S.A. § 67** PUBLIC LIBRARIES; STATEMENT OF POLICY; USE OF FACILITIES AND RESOURCES. (page 1, line 6)
- The amendment of **Sec. 2. 22 V.S.A. § 69** PUBLIC LIBRARIES; SELECTION AND RECONSIDERATION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS. (page 1, line 17)

Vermont Library Association also supports the recommended amended language suggested by the Vermont Department of Libraries<sup>1</sup> to **§ 69**.

These amendments will allow Vermont's libraries to remain centers of inquiry and discovery through equitable access to information and space for *all* Vermonters and will safeguard each individual Vermonter's constitutionally-protected freedom to read while protecting the diversity of voices in our public library collections. These amendments are also very practical measures with support structures in place to ensure all of our public libraries can successfully implement these policies.

These amendments will support Vermont librarians' ongoing work of building collections for all members of their community, safeguarding each individual Vermonter's constitutionally-protected freedom to read, and protecting the diversity of voices and

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<sup>1</sup> A public library shall adopt ~~a policy for library material selection policy and procedures for the reconsideration of library materials~~ *the selection and reconsideration of library materials that complies with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and State laws prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation that reflect Vermont's diverse people and history, including diversity of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, and political beliefs.* A public library may adopt as its policy a model policy adopted by the Department of Libraries pursuant to section 606 of this title.

experiences represented in our public libraries' collections. When building any library collection, there will always be books and materials that will be of high interest to a majority of the community and there will also be books and materials that will be of interest and relevance to a minority of the community. Civil rights protect the rights of all - the majority and the minority - and for Vermont libraries, this results in richer collections with many voices.

The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) has released new data documenting book challenges throughout the United States<sup>2</sup>, finding that challenges of unique titles surged 65% in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching the highest level ever documented.

It is critical to understand that these banning attempts are not arbitrary, there is a target and that target is very clearly represented in the statistics. Books representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals made up 47 percent of those targeted in unconstitutional censorship attempts. These are the voices and lives of so many of the amazing young people I have the privilege to work with every day. These are the voices and lives of our family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. Vermont has a powerful opportunity with this bill to say- we will not negate these lived experiences, and we will not silence these voices. Vermont libraries need to represent and serve *all* Vermonters.

The Vermont Library Association strongly supports adding “public libraries” to **Sec. 4 V.S.A § 1702 CRIMINAL THREATENING** (page 2, line 14.) This is an important amendment to ensure all of Vermont’s public libraries have the same protections as places open to the public such as schools, polling centers and *places*.

**Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE** (page 8 line 9)

The Vermont Library Association requests that S.220 have an effective date of **June 30, 2025**. This extended time is critical to allow for the adoption of the policies in **§ 67 and § 69**, in our public libraries.

Thank you very much.

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<sup>2</sup> Ragarcia, R. (2024, March 14). *American Library Association reports record number of unique book titles challenged in 2023*. News and Press Center. <https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2024/03/american-library-association-reports-record-number-unique-book-titles>