



To: House Education Committee

From: Margaret Woodruff, Government Relations and Advocacy Committee Chair, Vermont Library Association

Date: April 8, 2026

Subject: S.232: An act relating to public libraries and the Department of Libraries

Introduction to the Vermont Library Association

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm Margaret Woodruff, the Director of the Charlotte Library and the chair of the Vermont Library Association Government Relations & Advocacy Committee. The Vermont Library Association (or VLA) is a non-profit organization whose members come from the 202 public and academic libraries in Vermont. Unlike libraries in many states, Vermont libraries do not have a centralized government body and do not receive any direct state funding. Beyond the individual relationships with our local towns and boards, libraries often end up problem solving in isolation. VLA works to bring libraries together to develop, promote, and improve library services and libraries across the state. Libraries stopped being quiet reading rooms many decades ago and now are the community spaces that welcome people of ages and interests to engage, explore, communicate, and, of course, read.

S232 helps to support this diverse work in many ways and dovetails with the priorities identified by the VLA as essential for the continued success of libraries and their communities: These include:

- Creating avenues for capital funding needed to keep libraries safe, welcoming, and secure.
- Assuring that interlibrary loan programs are reliable, accessible, and stable.
- Recognizing and incorporating the initiatives of libraries into the broader literacy efforts.

By addressing these key needs, supporters ensure that libraries continue to serve their communities successfully.

Capital Funding

As mentioned above, lack of capital funding remains a huge obstacle to creating the safe and accessible spaces we strive to provide as librarians. According to the Vermont Department of Libraries, Vermont library buildings are in need of \$260 million worth of basic improvement and deferred maintenance. From the largest libraries like the Rutland Free to the smallest library, the

Charles D. Brainerd Library in West Danville, many of these treasured institutions need substantial improvements and repairs to meet safety and access standards as well as continue to provide vital services and resources their respective communities expect and need. The 2023 Working Group Report of the Status of Libraries in Vermont highlighted this critical situation, which was further substantiated by the results of the Vermont Department of Libraries 2025 building survey.

Bond Bank Access

The Charlotte Library completed a much-needed expansion/renovation project in 2020. This has transformed our library space into a community hub, busy at all times of day with everything from story times to cooking lessons and book discussions to healthcare consultations. This improvement to the building and our services would not have been possible without a bond through the Vermont Bond Bank, voted at Charlotte Town Meeting in 2019. The cost per year for this loan has been less than \$25 per household. Staff at the Vermont Bond Bank have expressed continued willingness to work with municipalities to pursue library-related projects in an accessible and fiscally responsible manner, creating a path forward for capital funding and addressing the critical condition of our institutions. S232 clarifies eligibility for those projects to proceed at any Vermont public library.

Additional Programs

Whether old or new, inside the walls of Vermont libraries are the projects and programs that help to promote early literacy and keep readers of all ages engaged and informed. The VLA is excited by the opportunities that S232 may provide for Vermont libraries to do more. At the Charlotte Library, we host a Kindergarten Library Card Party before the start of school each August. Every incoming kindergartener gets their own library card as we welcome them into the library community. In addition, we have partnered with Charlotte Central on a variety of summer and afterschool programs, such as "Classical Connections," that support reading and literacy outside of the classroom. The potential to reach more students and address the concern around reading ability and related academic achievement is real and librarians are ready to do the work.

The piece of S232 that addresses the funding for these kinds of programs received a lot of attention while the Senate was working on the bill. Currently, libraries are not able to meet the requirements of the Agency of Education's grant application process in order to access the after school and summer reading program funding. The language in the bill voted out of the Senate represents a compromise that will ensure that the Agency of Education takes steps to change the process and make funding opportunities more accessible to libraries, including the small libraries in rural communities. This language also leaves open the possibility of allocating a portion of these funds to the Department of Libraries directly; these funds could then be allocated to individual libraries for whom a larger grant application might be a barrier to the very programs they seek to provide. Current funding for Summer Reading resources and materials is capped at \$300 per library.

Vermont Library Day

Finally, celebrating libraries around the state through the designation of Vermont Library Day is a way to increase awareness of the broad and meaningful roles that libraries play in our communities. Many of our libraries serve as cold-weather warming centers in winter and provide lunches along with summer reading programs when school is out. In communities that have been impacted by flooding, libraries serve as flood-recovery hubs, providing affected community members with the information and access they need to begin rebuilding their homes and their livelihoods. We continue to work with partners in our towns and villages to meet community demand, from creating dementia-friendly spaces to offering access to employment training and preparation. We are delighted to have the opportunity to share our work and enthusiasm with the Vermont Library Day designation. I am happy to answer any questions.