



To: House Judiciary Committee

Date: April 2, 2026

Subject: S.209: Language including public libraries

From: Cal Hale, Lobbyist, Vermont Library Association

For the record: Cal Hale, testifying on behalf of the Vermont Library Association (VLA). Thank you for inviting me in today to share the Association's position on S.209.

The Vermont Library Association is an educational nonprofit that works to develop, promote, and improve library and information services and librarianship in Vermont. The organization, which is Vermont's chapter of the American Library Association, has over 300 members including public, academic, and school librarians, as well as library trustees and friends.

VLA supports the objective of S.209 to prohibit civil arrest in sensitive locations. I'm joining you today to ask that your committee protect the safe and stable environments in which libraries throughout Vermont provide a multitude of services to their communities by adding public libraries to the list of sensitive locations where S.209 would prohibit civil arrest.

Twenty-First Century Libraries

In making this request, I want to highlight the increasingly broad role that libraries play in Vermont's communities and the wide array of programming that Vermont libraries provide. Libraries stopped being quiet reading rooms a long while ago. They're now vibrant and lively community spaces, and in many rural communities, they serve as a lifeline for community members to access important resources.

The [Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont Final Report](#) in November 2023 documented this evolving role and some of the ways in which libraries fill social service gaps in communities. This report characterizes libraries as "the only gateway to the digital age"—the only place where patrons without reliable home internet can reliably access resources online. As more and more resources are accessed solely through the internet, libraries are an increasingly critical space for patrons to access judicial proceedings, legal information, healthcare, and numerous social services— all services that S.209 seeks to protect.

Librarians have shared some of their experiences of patrons regularly utilizing library resources to send and receive materials related to immigration proceedings, print court documents, seek information about their rights, and access space for meetings with social workers. Libraries have served communities and community members in their most vulnerable moments, functioning as flood recovery hubs, food distribution centers, and extreme cold weather shelters. New Americans in particular are served at libraries through Vermont Adult Learning's services for

English learners and a variety of programs from the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

For students, libraries are an important third space: a place where they can spend time and access programs outside of home or school. Libraries offer numerous educational opportunities, including afterschool and summer programming, and frequently serve as hubs for students to gather after school. In these communities, where libraries effectively serve as an extension of local schools, it is important that students utilizing these spaces have the same level of protection that they do at educational institutions.

S.209 in Libraries

The inclusion of libraries in S.209 would benefit both patrons and library staff.

For patrons, it would ensure consistency in the bill's impact: as Vermonters access essentials of life, they would be able to do so in environments that are protected from civil arrest. This would be particularly important for individuals working towards citizenship or legal status who rely on libraries for access to necessary information, programs, and judicial proceedings throughout their immigration process.

For library staff, S.209 would provide clarity and consistency for developing policies around law enforcement in libraries. Currently, library staff (many of whom are part time or volunteers) must understand the complexities of what kinds of documentation permits law enforcement to access different parts of library buildings and information systems. S.209 would offer clear guidance by designating libraries as protected spaces from civil arrest.

S.209 will not prevent law enforcement from ensuring the safety of library patrons and staff through standard law enforcement practices, including making arrests in cases where doing so is necessary for patron or staff safety.

The Importance of Library-Specific Language

Finally, I want to explain the importance of using specific language to include public libraries on the list of sensitive locations in statute, even in the event that language extending the protections in S.209 to municipal buildings is re-incorporated into the bill. While the inclusion of municipal buildings in S.209 would include municipal libraries, 73 of Vermont's public libraries are incorporated libraries— not municipal libraries. Incorporated libraries provide identical service to their communities as municipal libraries, in fact, most Vermonters would have no idea whether their community's library is municipal or incorporated. However, incorporated libraries are chartered as separate nonprofit entities, so they are not included under the definition of municipal buildings.

Therefore, regardless of whether or not the committee incorporates municipal buildings in S.209, it is important that the following language be added under Section 1, subsection (c) to ensure the inclusion of all public libraries:

"public library, as that term is defined in 22 V.S.A. § 101(2)."

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Thank you for your consideration of this request, and I'm happy to answer any questions.