

**Vermont Library Association testimony to the Senate Education Committee on S. 232:
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Amy Williams: Vice President of the Vermont Library Association (VLA) and Assistant Director of Rutland Free Library.

Margaret Woodruff: Chair of the VLA Government Relations & Advocacy Committee and Director of the Charlotte Library.

The Vermont Library Association is a non-profit organization whose members come from the 202 public and academic libraries in Vermont. Vermont libraries do not have a centralized governing body. Beyond individual relationships with our local towns and Boards, libraries often end up problem-solving in isolation. The Vermont Library Association works to bring libraries together collaboratively to develop, promote, and improve libraries and library services. Libraries stopped being quiet reading rooms a long while ago. They're now vibrant, lively, and frequently loud community spaces, with all the blessings and issues that brings. S. 232 helps support our changing work in many ways.

Many Vermont libraries face immense capital needs in order to offer spaces that are safe and accessible for all. According to the Vermont Department of Libraries, Vermont library buildings are in need of \$260 million worth of basic improvements and deferred maintenance. Therefore, VLA has identified Capital Funding for Libraries as a top priority. 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 the essential service 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 substantiated by the results of the Vermont Department of Libraries building survey in 2025.

The Charlotte Library completed a much-needed expansion/renovation project in 2020 that has transformed our library space into a community hub, busy at all times of day with everything from storytimes to cooking lessons, book discussions to health 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. S. 232 would create a more direct means for those projects to proceed.

In terms of Early Literacy, libraries are currently not eligible for many kinds of literacy-supportive funding. But we have been doing early literacy work for quite some time, and are excited by the opportunities that S. 232 may provide for us to do more. At Rutland Free, we began a partnership in 2020 with an outside organization which mails free books to children ages 0-5. The outside organization must continually fundraise to cover the costs of this program. When

the kids “graduate”, we hold a ceremony at the library and get them signed up for library cards, creating a continuum of literacy. The Department of Libraries does a wonderful job every year of making sure libraries are connected to the Summer Reading Program resources and materials.

Finally, celebrating libraries around the state through the designation of Vermont Library Day is a way to increase awareness of the broad roles that libraries play in our communities. Many of our libraries will serve as warming centers this coming cold weekend and will also provide summer lunches along with summer reading programs when school is out. We continue to work with partners to meet community demand, from creating dementia-friendly spaces to offering access to employment resources. We are delighted to have the opportunity to share our work and enthusiasm with this designation. We welcome any questions.