

Testimony of the Maine Council for English Language Arts

In Support of LD 1404 – Resolve, to Create a Working Group on the Status of School Libraries and on Public Libraries in Maine



Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
April 10, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Patti Forster, and I am the President of the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA), a professional organization dedicated to advancing literacy and English language arts education across our state. I submit this testimony on behalf of our organization in strong support of LD 1404, “Resolve, to Create a Working Group on the Status of School Libraries and on Public Libraries in Maine,” sponsored by Representative Kelly Murphy.

LD 1404 is not just a policy proposal—it is an urgent invitation to reimagine and reinvest in some of our most powerful and enduring public institutions: libraries. Maine’s school and public libraries have long stood as pillars of literacy, community access, lifelong learning, and civic engagement. They serve not only as repositories of books but as hubs for knowledge, imagination, safety, and human connection.

As English language arts educators, we witness daily how essential libraries are to student learning and well-being. In school libraries, students find not only the texts that inspire and inform their academic journeys, but also a sense of belonging, access to technology, and the support of skilled librarians who nurture inquiry and curiosity. Public libraries extend that support beyond the school walls, bridging gaps for families and community members of all ages.

The working group proposed by LD 1404 is critical because it recognizes the broad and evolving role libraries play in supporting:

- **Literacy development**, especially for vulnerable or marginalized populations.
- **Digital access and media literacy**, crucial in an age of information overload and misinformation.
- **Public health and emergency preparedness**, as libraries often serve as warming centers, information hubs, and distribution points during crises.
- **Economic development**, access to job search tools, workforce training, and small business resources.
- **Community and belonging**, by curating welcoming and representative collections and creating welcoming, affirming spaces for all community members.

Too often, the essential work of libraries goes unseen or is undervalued. This resolve offers an opportunity to deeply examine the realities, challenges, and possibilities that exist within our school and public libraries—and to envision how state policy can uplift and sustain them.

MCELA urges the committee to vote in favor of LD 1404. Establishing this working group is an investment in literacy, community, and Maine’s future. We thank Representative Murphy for her leadership and this committee for its thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Forster
President, Maine Council for English Language Arts
maine.ela@gmail.com
(925)639-4211