

Dear Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs,

Our names are Jack DeAngelis, Brenda Sawyer, Chelsea Scott and Bridget Wright and we are English teachers at Lincoln Academy in Newcastle. We are testifying in strong support of LD 1404.

As high school English teachers, we know that the library is the lifeblood of our school. Beyond being a cultural hub and safe space for all students, it's deeply important to the health and well being of our whole educational system. We have already felt the loss of the Gale databases from Digital Maine Library deeply, and found that without them, it's been harder to get quality sources into our students' hands for research projects across the whole curriculum. We need access to high quality resources to provide our students with high quality education. We must devote more time, energy, and money to our library systems in Maine, not less.

As both lifelong library users and high school English teachers, we have experienced firsthand how essential libraries are—not just for access to books and research materials, but as vital community centers that nurture curiosity, connection, and opportunity for all.

Libraries are places where students can learn more about themselves and their communities. Our school library proudly displays the Maine Student Book Award Northstar YA nominees and encourages students to vote on them at the end of each year. These books highlight diversity of all kinds, centering the importance of identity. Our collection intentionally gives students access to books that act as windows, mirrors, and doors, allowing them to better understand not just themselves, but the world around them. This fosters empathy and understanding while building community.

In our classrooms, students and teachers view the school library as well as the local library in town as extensions of our learning space. Our school library empowers students to explore their interests, develop research skills, grow as independent thinkers, and participate in a meaningful learning community. School libraries nurture student curiosity and support their intellectual growth through use of both traditional texts and new technologies to better prepare for future careers. As high school English teachers, we see the deep impact this access to knowledge has on the hearts and minds of our students, inspiring them to examine how their interests intersect with needs in our community and beyond.

Libraries are some of the only “third spaces” left in America; they are spaces where one can go to engage in community or solitude without having to pay to do so. This is integral for a healthy society. Our local town library, Skidompha, is brimming with high school students all weekdays after school. Students meet there to play games together, to find a quiet place to work on homework after sports practice, and to wait somewhere safe until they can be picked up by working parents. Whether socializing, looking for books, using the internet, or waiting to be picked up, they find trusted support and guidance from skilled librarians who care deeply about them and welcome them wholeheartedly.

Skidompha offers resiliency-building tools that are free to all, providing spaces for groups to hold emergency preparedness classes, worship services and meditation meetings, cooking classes, and reading sessions for young children and their parents. The programming at Skidompha supports everyone, from school-aged kids to the elderly and everyone in between.

Libraries are democratic spaces. They promote civic engagement, economic opportunity, public health, and social resilience. Lincoln County and the greater Maine community are home people with a wide variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, all of whom deserve free access to information. This access to information fuels the growth and economic success of these communities, informing recent high school graduates about how to start their own businesses, or a new Mainer about how and where to apply for jobs. Despite Internet ubiquity, not all households are able to access the web of information that many of us take for granted. By supporting this bill, you uphold values of equity and intellectual liberty and the infrastructure that holds many of our communities together.

Looking back, libraries are the keepers of our history, both in the form of historical reference texts as well as artwork and literature that maps our trajectory through time and paves the way for future generations to learn from the past. By supporting this bill, you support the maintenance and evolution of a living historical record, built daily through the addition of articles to databases and books to library collections.

Looking forward, libraries have evolved into dynamic centers of information technology, enabling communities of every size to stay current and engaged in our quickly-changing social and scientific landscape. By supporting this bill, you empower the continued evolution of our society through the free and fair sharing of access to modern tools.

We, as English teachers of Lincoln Academy, trust that the Legislature considers these points of utmost importance and will do what is necessary to preserve the vital resources that are our school and public libraries. We are willing to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

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