

Testimony in support of LD 1404: Resolve, to Create a Working Group on the Status of School Libraries and on Public Libraries in Maine.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Kerrie Lattari, I am a resident of Old Orchard Beach, the Library Media Specialist at York Middle School in York, ME, and a proud board member of the Maine Association of School Libraries. I am submitting this testimony with enthusiastic support of LD 1404, which seeks to create a working group to study the needs of Maine's school and public libraries. This study will no doubt be crucial to strengthening our libraries statewide.

Last week on April 3, 2025, youth service and school librarians from all corners of Maine made the trek to Augusta to participate in the annual Reading Round Up conference for a day of sharing, networking, learning, and celebrating all of the ways we provide literacy services to Maine's youngest citizens. A day like this is invaluable. It is a chance to explore how librarians are helping children to build their reading identities, tap into their creativity, indulge their curiosity, explore technology, develop a global perspective, and find their place in the world. In addition to building our skill repertoire, we also get to discuss the challenges we face in a variety of areas including budgets, staffing, collection development, curriculum, service gaps, administrative support, and more. If we are to move forward in our provision of services, these obstacles must be addressed. This proposed working group is a tremendous step in doing so.

One essential area for study is how our school libraries are staffed. In the best circumstances there is a certified Library Media Specialist with an Ed Tech for support at each school in a district. However, this is not the current situation for many Maine towns. There is a wide variety of staffing arrangements depending on the school or district with some relying completely on support staff and others not staffing their libraries at all. Clearly, there is great disparity in regards to whether students have access to a certified Library Media Specialist and other trained library staff. This of course means that there is a great disparity in the services and expertise students are afforded throughout their school day.

A growing area of concern is the need to intentionally teach media literacy skills to our K-12 population. While knowing how to critically view and evaluate information has always been a necessary skill, at the risk of sounding trite, now more than ever we need a populace who can navigate a complex media environment. Depending on age, American youth spend 2-9 hours consuming media each day. In my own interactions and observations with my 5th-8th grade students, I can assure you that while they may be digital natives, they need explicit, consistent, on-going instruction in order to successfully use, analyze, and create digital media in a healthy and productive way.

In 2017, the Maine Association of School Libraries published the Maine Effective School Library Program Standards. Both the Maine State Library and the Maine Library Commission have endorsed these standards which provide "an aspirational road map to excellence in quality

school library programs.” It would be pertinent for this working group to use these standards as a guideline to help determine the state of our school libraries at present. Consideration by the Maine Department of Education to adopt these standards officially would further the ability of Maine’s school libraries to become highly effective.

It is my hope that through the passing of LD 1404, the difficulties I have described above, in addition to the others facing our school and public libraries, will be given the analysis and consideration they deserve. This study is critical to understanding the needs of Maine’s libraries and planning for their future. I urge the members of this committee to support LD 1404.

Sincerely,

Kerrie Lattari, MLIS.
Library Media Specialist, York School Department