

**Public Testimony for the Maine Library Association  
In Support of LD 1404 – Resolve to Convene a Library Working Group  
Presented to: Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Kelly Murphy, and Members of  
the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee**

**Delivered by: Amy Wisehart, President, on behalf of the Maine Library Association**

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished committee members.

My name is Amy Wisehart and I'm here today on behalf of the **Maine Library Association**, which has proudly served as the voice for Maine libraries and library workers since 1891. I want to first express our deep gratitude to Representative Murphy for introducing this important bill and for working with the Maine Library Association to ensure that libraries remain central to the future of our state. Thank you to all committee members for your unwavering commitment to education, libraries, and culture in Maine.

We strongly support this bill to establish a working group that will conduct a comprehensive study of Maine's school and public libraries. This resolve represents more than a policy measure—it is a vital opportunity to tell the full story of how libraries are evolving to meet the needs of all Mainers.

In 2023, Maine's 257 public libraries:

- Welcomed over **4.5 million visitors**,
- Circulated nearly **7 million items**, and
- Delivered over **43,000 educational and literacy programs**, attended by more than **600,000 people**.

Libraries serve everyone, but they are especially indispensable to **vulnerable populations**. From seniors aging in place, to children in need of literacy support, to individuals with disabilities, libraries are often the most consistent, trusted, and *free* access point for services, information, and community engagement. Walk into any public library in Maine and you are likely to see families enjoying a storytime, people using meeting space, patrons browsing the collection, public computer and wifi users, and community members connecting. Libraries bring people together, building communities and providing critical information access.

Libraries are also on the frontlines of **emergency preparedness**, functioning as cooling and warming centers, charging stations during storms, and as places of calm and safety in times of crisis. They help close the digital divide by teaching tech skills and lending devices and internet hotspots to students, remote workers, and job seekers.

But behind every successful library service is a dedicated team—and many are under-resourced. With a statewide analysis, this working group will help us better understand **staffing needs**, building and infrastructure needs, **technology gaps**, resource sharing among libraries, **partnership opportunities**, and the **real costs** of keeping library doors open and services accessible.

We're especially pleased that this bill recognizes the intersection of libraries with **public health**, **economic development**, and **community resilience**. Libraries don't just offer books—they support food security, telehealth access, workforce readiness, and civic engagement. They are essential to Maine's infrastructure.

As one of the most rural states in the country, Maine is home to many small public libraries with limited resources. Similarly, many school libraries are challenged to meet the needs of their students given limited funding. A comprehensive, statewide study will give us a fuller picture of the needs of Maine's libraries and the best ways to meet them.

On behalf of the Maine Library Association, we respectfully urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on this bill. This working group will allow us to build a roadmap for library sustainability, equity, and innovation—ensuring every Mainer in every community has access to the resources and opportunities they deserve.

Thank you again for your leadership and your time.