

Good morning. My name is Chloe Deblois, and I am a resident of Newcastle, Maine.

I am here addressing you as both a citizen of the State of Maine, and a librarian at Skidompha Public Library. Skidompha Library is proud to be part of one of this country's greatest public traditions. Libraries are a promise to current and future generations. They guarantee access to literature, information, connection, services and resources, and the shared inheritance of the humanities. Skidompha's mission is centered on these principles of equality and accessibility. We are open and welcoming to everyone, respectful of all patrons who visit us, and committed to upholding the American tradition of free and open inquiry and discourse of which libraries are such an enduring expression.

At our library alone, we saw 63,450 visitors in the year 2024. We were able to offer 347 programs to aid in the education, entertainment, and community building of our patrons. In addition to our programs, we host a free pantry to give access to food and other necessities to anyone who needs them. We are a safe, dry place for people to sit and gather. We have conference rooms, reading space, and technology help available; our collection comprises tens of thousands of books, films, documentary sources, and items. And we are just one of the over 250 public libraries around the state, not to mention the many school and university libraries.

But I don't want to give the impression that libraries are simply a collection of numbers and statistics. It is the connections between people that help make them so special. Some months ago, a patron told me that she had actually chosen to move to Damariscotta due to the friendly welcome she always received at the library. More recently, while I was helping an elderly gentleman access his email on one of our public computers, he talked to me for some time about all of the things he was worried about right now, and ended with telling me that he was "glad I was on his team." We see teens excitedly come in after school every day, to see their friends, and to tell our teen services librarian about the books and programs they want to see. Dozens of toddlers come twice a week with their parents to sing and clap and enjoy storytime, bringing joy to themselves and all of us who get to hear them. Through the valiant efforts of our local sixth-graders in tearing down generational differences, our librarians are *that much closer* to maybe understanding what "skibidi" means.

Joking aside, our libraries are a hugely important part of our communities, our way of life, and our access to the information and resources we need to be healthy citizens and healthy people. Now, more than ever, we need to support our libraries and our communities.

I firmly believe that a group formed to study the importance and impact of libraries to our state will not only enshrine that importance, but help us to solidify and uphold an institution that makes all of us stronger. Thank you for your time.