

LD1404 PROPONANT Testimony – Wed, Apr 9, 2025

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

My name is Katherine Webber and I am the director of the Topsham Public Library in Topsham and am a resident of Lisbon. I am testifying today in support of LD 1404, which seeks to create a working group to study the needs of Maine's school and public libraries. This group will study facility conditions & accessibility, availability of technology, the diversity of library collections, and library partnerships, all of which are crucial to strengthening our libraries statewide.

I was born in Maine and have lived in here for most of my life. I have worked in libraries for over a decade and have a Master's degree in Library Science. Some of my earliest memories of libraries are visiting the Children's room in the basement of the one just down the street, Lithgow Public Library. My parents have always been avid readers and when we didn't have the resources to own every book we wanted to read, the library was there to help. When I had a project for school or just wanted a place to hang out after school before sports practice, it was to the library that I went.

I have seen library workers help patrons find resources for citizenship, language learning, and employment. My own library in Topsham hosts tax preparation through a community partnership with AARP. My home library in Lisbon often collaborates with the local high school to host and promote student art. I have helped people find books about cancer, depression, parenting, world politics, and that one with the red cover. I watch events pop up on my social media feed for libraries hosting authors, social workers, veterans, animal rescuers, and journalists. Every library works hard to be the resource that every user needs.

Libraries are vital to the people of our beautiful state, whether they live here year-round or seasonally, whether they are vacationing in a different town or visiting the library down the street. We offer books, DVDs, graphic novels, and e-audiobooks, certainly. But what else might we be able to do to support the betterment, education, and well-being of our citizens if we knew the areas in which we are lacking?

Libraries are the cornerstones of communities. Particularly here in Maine where we have over 200 public libraries for a population of just over 1.4 million and the per capita use is comparable to libraries in Massachusetts and better than Maryland.¹

Having lived in both of those other states, I know that their library structures are different and could offer insight into what resources and support could be beneficial here.

Having worked in a few different libraries in this state, I know that community need can greatly vary and what works in one library, may not work in them all. However, there are common

¹ Table 701.60. "Number of public libraries, number of books and serial volumes, and per capita usage of selected library services per year, by state or jurisdiction: Fiscal years 2019 and 2020"
https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_701.60.asp

denominators which enable libraries to share resources and ideas, to connect and collaborate, and having a comprehensive review of these would benefit us all.

My ask of you today is simply this: please support LD 1404 and in doing so, support Maine's libraries and the work we do across the state, now and in our plans for the future.

Thank you for your time and I would be willing to answer any questions.

Katherine Webber
Director, Topsham Public Library
Resident, Lisbon Falls