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Testimony of Kelly Noonan Murphy Introducing
**LD 1404, Resolve, to Create a Working Group on the Status of School
Libraries and on Public Libraries in Maine**
Before the Joint Standing Committee of Education and Cultural Affairs

Good morning, Sen. Rafferty and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Rep. Kelly Murphy and I represent District 125, which includes part of Scarborough. I am honored to sponsor **LD 1404, Resolve, to Create a Working Group on the Status of School Libraries and on Public Libraries in Maine.**

Libraries are cornerstones of our communities, offering invaluable resources that contribute to the success of our students and the overall well-being of the public. However, libraries across Maine—whether school libraries or public libraries—are facing growing challenges. Insufficient funding, understaffing, aging infrastructure and the rapid pace of technological change have made it increasingly difficult for libraries to serve their communities effectively.

As legislators, we have a responsibility to support institutions that foster education, community engagement, and lifelong learning. Libraries are not just places where people check out books; they are hubs of information, community gathering and educational support. They are places where individuals of all ages gain access to technology, acquire critical skills and find resources to improve their quality of life.

Currently, libraries in Maine are facing significant disparities in access to resources. Rural areas often struggle with limited access to books, technology and professional library staff, while urban areas are contending with overcrowded facilities and an increasing demand for library services. In schools, a lack of dedicated funding and staffing has led to libraries that are unable to support student needs in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

This working group will have the crucial task of assessing the state of school and public libraries across Maine, identifying the specific challenges they face, and making recommendations to ensure that our libraries can continue to serve as pillars of education and community engagement.

The working group will focus on:

District 125: Part of Scarborough

1. **Assessing the Needs of Libraries:** Gathering data to better understand the current state of school and public libraries, including funding, staffing, resources and infrastructure.
2. **Identifying Disparities:** Analyzing how libraries in different regions of Maine—whether rural or urban—are impacted differently and working toward equitable solutions.
3. **Recommending Solutions:** Developing practical, actionable recommendations to improve library services, access and sustainability, which could include legislative action, funding proposals and policy changes.
4. **Strengthening Support:** Advocating for stronger state and federal support for libraries, to ensure that every community has access to quality library services.

Public and school libraries are essential to Maine’s educational and social fabric. From supporting early literacy to providing job search assistance and community programs, libraries are often the only free resource available to many Maine residents. Moreover, libraries are instrumental in supporting Maine’s commitment to closing the digital divide, providing essential services that enable people to connect to the internet, access government resources and improve their digital literacy.

It is crucial that we recognize and address the challenges facing these institutions before they become insurmountable. Maine’s libraries are a lifeline, and we must ensure they remain strong, accessible and effective in meeting the needs of our residents.

I am confident that the creation of this working group will lead to meaningful improvements for libraries across our state. It is time that we provide our libraries with the attention, resources and support they deserve to continue their vital work. I ask for your support in passing this bill to create the Working Group on the Status of School and Public Libraries in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.