

## **Public Testimony in Support of LD 1404**

**Presented by Sonya Durney, PhD MLIS**

Good [morning/afternoon], Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed committee members.

My name is Dr. Sonya Durney. I'm an academic librarian, a policy advocate, and past president of the Maine Library Association. My research focuses on how public policy impacts libraries and access to information, including the critical importance of protecting intellectual freedom.

I am here today to strongly support LD 1404—a bill that allows Maine to lead the nation in strengthening our libraries and safeguarding the rights of all Mainers to access information freely.

Across the country and here in Maine, libraries are under increasing pressure. We are seeing a wave of legislation that seeks to restrict access to books and information, criminalize librarians, threaten First Amendment rights, impose rating systems, defund libraries, and ban the teaching of so-called “divisive concepts” (EveryLibrary, 2024). These efforts not only endanger intellectual freedom—they threaten the very institutions that support informed, engaged communities.

In rural Maine, libraries are often the only free public resource for internet access, technology, educational programming, and a welcoming third space. Yet, as Dr. Kate Wing's research highlights, over 30% of Maine's public library directors lack formal library education and must navigate increasingly complex issues with limited support. LD 1404 would help equip these library leaders with the tools and guidance to make evidence-based decisions to serve their communities with confidence and integrity.

In addition, libraries are not just cultural institutions—they are economic engines. In 2023 alone, Maine's libraries contributed more than \$140 million in economic value. For every \$1 invested, they return \$3.34 in benefits to Maine communities (Maine State Library, 2024). Nationally, this number is closer to \$5. This bill is a wise investment in our shared future, ensuring that libraries remain trusted, effective, and accessible for all.

Vermont offers a powerful example. There, a legislative Working Group on the Status of Libraries led to meaningful reform, culminating in the passage of VT S0220. This bipartisan legislation:

- Requires libraries to adopt policies that align with First Amendment and civil rights protections,
- Protects the confidentiality of minors' library records,

- Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of library trustees, and
- Ensures that material selection policies reflect diverse voices and defend intellectual freedom.

LD 1404 proposes a similar working group here in Maine. The Vermont model shows what is possible when state leaders, librarians, and communities work together to strengthen—not weaken—our libraries. I wrote more about this in a piece in the *Maine Policy Review* (Durney, 2024). LD 1404 will bring together bipartisan stakeholders from across the state to assess the current status of our libraries and provide recommendations to ensure they are well-resourced, inclusive, and resilient—especially in our rural and underserved communities.

Passing LD 1404 would send a clear message: that Maine stands for free access to information, for inclusive public institutions, and for the power of lifelong learning. This is not about promoting any one viewpoint. It's about preserving the right of every Mainer—regardless of age, background, or belief—to equitable access to information.

I urge you to support LD 1404 and help secure the future of Maine's libraries as vital, resilient, and free institutions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Sonya Durney

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## Citations

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