

Dear Tom,

In response to The Working Group for the Status of Libraries call for testimony, I am submitting statements regarding two program initiatives that have a significant impact on my practice as a youth services librarian and the programs we offer at Bennington Free Library.

### 1. Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI):

Now more than ever, our libraries are providing expanded services and outreach to children and families. Librarians work continuously to improve the cognitive content of our programming, as we elevate the traditional story hour into meaningful learning experiences for children. Thanks to VELI, Bennington Free Library & many public libraries throughout the state have been able to do this. Thanks to our VELI training, we know that in order to be successful learners and communicators, young children need multiple experiences with books, frequent and interesting conversations with adults, and diverse and repeated early learning experiences. Thanks to VELI, our public library has been central in providing these learning opportunities throughout our community, even during the pandemic. VELI began in 2010 and has been a guiding light ever since...we hope that this important work can continue with the support of the Vermont Department of Libraries.

### 2. Museum ABC's:

The Museum ABC's program is a collaboration between Bennington Museum and Bennington Free Library. The program is intended for children ages 3 to 5 and their adult companions and supports early literacy and a lifelong love of museums and learning. Now in its eleventh year, the innovative and hands-on program has impacted the lives of hundreds of pre-school children. Children and families have explored art, objects and historical concepts in the galleries of the Museum, engaged in storytelling and fundamental literacy exercises, and created artwork based on monthly themes. Children ask and answer questions, share their opinions, make observations and work collaboratively. In partnership with Bennington Free Library, thematically appropriate children's books are shared during each session and families can further explore books which are available in the Children's Room. This year Museum ABC's received an A.D. Henderson Foundation grant to fund expansion and outreach of the program intended to serve our neediest families. This was a significant move forward especially during the pandemic. We intend to build on the momentum and continue with our mission. The Bennington Museum and Bennington Free Library "bookend" Main Street making the Museum ABC's message very clear: local libraries and local museums can work together to create community by supporting children & families.

Respectfully submitted,  
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