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AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
Northeast Correctional Complex  
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**To:** Working Group for the VT Libraries  
**From:** Karen Holmes, Volunteer Services Coordinator  
**Date:** 01/20/2023  
**Re:** Testimony

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At Northeast Correctional Complex in St Johnsbury, we have two buildings that house around 175 (+/-) individuals, who identify primarily as male. The smaller distribution of the population (60+/-) resides in Building 1. The library for this building is comprised of a set of bookshelves and is open/unmonitored circulation. The books in this building are supplied primarily through community donations. Our medium security building (building 2) has the larger distribution of the population (115 +/-) and a separate building that contains the library. This library is “staffed” by an incarcerated individual who is supervised by DOC staff. Books are checked in and out by the incarcerated population using a simple excel spreadsheet. They are allowed a maximum of 3 books out at a time and have two weeks to return them.

After receiving a recent gift of 800 new books from the VT Dept of Libraries using ARPA funds, our library is not only more current, but the books are (anecdotally) more circulated. Individuals access this space by submitting a request to DOC staff for an appointment. Browsing appointments are typically granted within a week of the request. This appointment system helps regulate the flow, which, in this setting is desired and limits disruptions to the CHSVT classes that take place in the same building. Additionally, the library inventory is posted on the tablets issued to everyone so they can request specific titles.

One of the biggest hurdles to maintaining our inventory is the return rate. Vermont’s prison system is unified (we do not discern between prison, jail, county lock-up, etc.) and our population moves between facilities often and for a variety of reasons – frequently taking books with them. There is also no consistent oversight regarding what people are leaving the facility with upon final release. Because of that, we will always be fighting a dwindling inventory. In an ideal world, we would love to see our library function more like a community public library in the following ways:

- Library staff who are trained in basic library services, both as a job within the facility, and a potential vocational skill post-release.

- Software to help track overdue books (increase return rate), inventory, and loss.
- Access to interlibrary loan materials (as appropriate) to support book discussion groups and special interests is an interesting concept but may be logistically difficult.
- Updated reference books in paperback would be a nice addition. We cannot send hardcover books into the units and there is rarely time for individuals to sit in the library space and study a reference book.
- An annual (not one time) injection of new books. The most popular genres are fantasy and mystery, but there is a wide range of preferences from westerns to real adventures.

Our hope, in the ideal prison library scenario, is to find practical ways to increase the similarities to a community library. In so doing, the goal would be to shift the culture to one that values this resource and shows it through a higher circulation and return rate.