

Almy Landauer
Adult Services Specialist
South Burlington Public Library

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To the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont,

Please accept the following testimony for your May 26th meeting.

Members of the public across the State of Vermont would greatly benefit from a state-wide or regional structure which gives them access to all Vermont libraries with minimal barriers. For decades, librarians have been asking the Vermont Department of Libraries to establish a state-wide library card system. Indeed, the genesis of Homecard in Chittenden County was a result of this void. Patrons love it.

Especially in our many small towns, but truly almost everywhere in Vermont, library staff are often thwarted in providing all the services, robust resources, and hours their residents need due to their limited local funding. Think of the patron who needs materials in languages other than English and has nothing to browse locally, the patron who uses public transportation and their city/town library is not on a route, the patron who works non-traditional hours and cannot get to their local library during its open hours, the patron who needs home delivery and their nearest library cannot provide it. A regional or state library card would empower Vermonters in using the libraries located close to where they work and where they live, or easily and without cost use a library that has a collection they need.

We have some structures in place that help broaden the resources and accessibility for patrons, such as Inter-Library loan and in the Chittenden County area, Homecard. These are limited in their reach and scope. I recently had a conversation with a patron who wanted to use our Library here in South Burlington because we offer Mango Languages as a digital resource and her home library does not. Due to the limits of the Homecard system, she could not do so.

Shifting to a regional or statewide library card system must be accompanied by state financial support for libraries to offset lost revenue for the nonresident fees that some libraries charge, and for the increase use of resources by new patrons. Inter-Library Loan and the courier system that supports it will still be a critical service and must continue to be supported by the Vermont Department of Libraries.

When people move to Vermont from just about any other state, they are often shocked that there is no county or regional or statewide library card. We are woefully out of step with modern library services in this regard. For a rural state where many people commute long

distances, a regional or state wide system makes sense. For Vermont it would mean a remarkable increase in access to critical library services.

Almy Landauer
She/Her
Adult Services Specialist
South Burlington Public Library
180 Market St.
South Burlington, VT 05403
802-846-4140 x5535