

VERMONT LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

TIPS AND TALKING POINTS

Vermont Library Association Legislative Day
Friday, January 18, 2008

Introduction

By far the most effective way to have an impact on legislative decisions is to have a face-to-face discussion with your Representative or Senator in order to get across a personal message.

In this case, the message is about why our public libraries are so important to the cultural and economic health of Vermont and the strength and vitality of our local communities.

We are very concerned that the health of our public libraries is at risk unless the state shows some leadership and invests financial resources into public libraries, as do most other states.

Here are some general suggestions

1. Introduce yourself: Name, where you live, your business or occupation

2. State your interest in securing state financial assistance to public libraries:

Why is it important to you and your community?

What will state funding enable your local library accomplish and how will it help to avoid reductions in services and impaired quality of existing services?

3. How did you get involved with this effort, e.g., as a patron, volunteer, staff person, board member, concerned member of the community.

4. Describe the services that your library provides in your community. What impact do they have on families, kids, elders, local businesses, low and moderate-income persons, people with special needs, etc. In other words, who are the real beneficiaries of your library's services?

5. Has demand increased; and if so, how much and for what types of services and materials, including computer access and internet connectivity, adult learning and career advancement, etc?

6. Provide some data on numbers of visitors, circulation, types of new materials needed.

7. Describe your sources of funding and your efforts on the local level to raise funds to meet your basic operating costs and maintain a basic level of services to the community. Note here that in most communities, funding is tied to the property tax, a funding source that has become tapped out; and that library staff and boards have been required to exert much effort to raise funds from other sources.

8. Why is the effort to secure state investments in public libraries as or more important than other legislative decisions? What will the state get for this investment? (You could describe what the Freeman grants did for your library)

9. What to ask your lawmaker to do:

Support state funding of a grant in aid program that would invest in all libraries that meet public library minimum standards, so that almost every library would receive some funding, equal to 10% of their operating budgets. Based upon a long period of study and analysis, this would cost about \$1.6 million annually.

Identify how state investments would be used in your public library.

Ask for their help with other legislative colleagues and the Administration to advance the establishment of the grant in aid program.

Try to enlist their agreement with the value at stake here: that Vermont cannot afford to allow the erosion of the important services provided by our public libraries.

Ask them to read the Study of the Joint fiscal Office and Legislative Council required by the passage of Act 25. (The study should be available by January 18.)

10. Offer to answer any questions that your lawmakers may have; indicate that you want them to keep you informed of the status of this proposal; and that you will be checking back in with them regularly.

11. Be friendly and respectful; these folks have many difficult decisions to make.