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To the Working Group for the Status of Libraries—

Thank you for the invitation to submit testimony on behalf of my organization, the Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF). CLiF's mission is to help inspire a love of reading and writing among under-resourced children across Vermont and New Hampshire. Since CLiF's founding in 1998, [we have served over 350,000 children](#), and given away over \$10 million in new, high-quality children's books. We've partnered with over 90 percent of the rural libraries in Vermont and New Hampshire towns with populations under 5,000, helping to increase circulation and build community around literacy. We also partner with public schools, out-of-school time programs, summer programs, affordable housing developments, correctional facilities, family centers, and other social service agencies to reach underserved youth in Vermont and New Hampshire.

Our longstanding partnership with public libraries has been and remains a mainstay of CLiF. Through our [Rural Libraries](#) grant program, we work closely with the public library, the local elementary school, and area early education locations to provide extensive support over the course of one school year. Libraries can also apply to our [Summer Readers](#), [Community Building](#), and [Revive](#) grant programs.

So how do we link to library workforce development, staff training, and continuing education?

Capacity is always an issue. If a library doesn't have employees or volunteers comfortable with basic grant writing, with available time to complete the application, and who are "in the loop" with these grant opportunities, then they may potentially miss out on wonderful and FREE programs for their communities. We work hard to reach our libraries in need; but we can't obviously write the grants for them.

We provide two professional development opportunities open to public librarians/staff/affiliates—both are free and held online in order to make it as easy to attend as possible. The first is our annual "Community Literacy Conference" that is open to all CLiF partners including librarians, teachers, school staff, administrators, out-of-school time providers, early educators, etc. This conference offers a total of 4.5 hours of training from presenters, as well as peer-to-peer sharing, updates on CLiF's research and work, and free books we send to participants! At the last event in March 2022 we offered three online workshops: "Building Diverse Classroom Collections and Facilitating New Conversations," "The Power of Story: Finding Your Voice," and "Using Nonfiction Graphic Novels."

We also hold a bi-annual "Rural Library Conference." This is held virtually and offers a total of 4.5 hours of professional development with a specific focus for small, rural libraries. At the last conference in Fall 2021, almost 150 people registered for the event. We offered three online workshops: "Diversity to Inclusion," "Singing a Story, Telling a Song: Tips for Creating Language-Rich Storytimes," and "Moving Forward Virtually with Family Initiatives during COVID." Each session was 1.5 hours long and anyone who logged in and identified themselves in the chat received a box of new books.

From our 2021 conference, we asked for feedback and here are some topics and themes that were requested for the next event (which will be held in Fall 2023):

- Engaging 0-5
- Reaching the homeschooling population
- ACES/SEL connections
- Staff Development on the cheap
- Mental Health First Aid
- Lose of school librarians – how to help
- Building flourishing communities
- Public movie
- Family & community engagement
- Blogs – technology
- Outreach & advertising

The last thing we offer are literacy program ideas available on CLiF's website that librarians can implement with little or no funds. We also have many professionally-produced videos to help librarians (and any adults) be more comfortable sharing stories and books with children. While librarians will not receive professional development credit for accessing these resources, they can use them to further develop their skills and programming.

Building our community, making connections, sharing stories, learning from each other, adjusting to current needs—these are all important aspects of our professional development opportunities.

As has been [widely reported](#), the [results](#) of the first [Nation's Report Card](#) since the pandemic began were [sobering](#). After years of disrupted learning, average reading proficiency scores for 9-year-olds plunged to their lowest level in over 30 years. While students across all demographics were impacted, the steepest declines were measured among students from historically under-resourced backgrounds. It's never been more important to ensure all kids in our communities have equitable access to enriching literacy experiences and resources, and why CLiF will continue to invest in our public libraries and librarians as important partners in our work.