

Dear Readers,

Maine Policy Review published a special issue on libraries in 2013, which emphasized the history, uniqueness, accomplishments, and statewide collaborations of Maine libraries.¹ This 2024 special issue on libraries focuses on the many changes in the world of information and the role of libraries over the last 12 years. Of course, libraries of all kinds are constantly changing and evolving, in response to technology, changes in how information is distributed and consumed, economics, and the COVID-19 pandemic, but through it all libraries remain anchors in their communities, be they Maine cities, small towns, hospitals, campuses, or schools.

Our authors explore over two dozen issues on a wide range of topics, including social work creep in public libraries, protecting the freedom to read, libraries and climate change, digital literacy education, resolving the problem of digital content, and the loss of libraries. The Margaret Chase Smith essay by library thought leader Tracie D. Hall, “Don’t Know What You’ve Got Till It’s Gone: Does the Disinvestment of America’s Libraries Signal the End of Civil Society?” addresses the impacts of the loss of libraries.

Libraries are too often seen as a “nice amenity” for their community. As demonstrated in several of our articles, all libraries, including public, campus, school, or hospital serve a much wider role. In fact, Eric Klinenberg, in his bestselling book *Palaces for the People* (2018), makes a cogent case that local public libraries are a critical part of the social infrastructure of a community and have a measurable positive effect on not only the quality of life but on a range of social issues. They are a shared space where critical connections are formed.² This is true for all types of libraries.

All our authors touch on policy issues either explicitly or implicitly. Decisions made at all levels of government and institutions affect libraries and their funding, often without awareness of the impacts of these decisions on services, staffing, quality of life for our citizens, and success of our students. Several authors offer policy recommendations or suggestions for increasing library policy advocacy.

We are proud that most of our authors are librarians from Maine and also excited to include some nationally known library authors who agreed to share their thoughts. We are grateful to the subject experts from around the country who also served as external peer reviewers of several articles. To all, thank you for contributing to this special issue of *Maine Policy Review*.

And to our readers, we hope you come away with a new appreciation for the ways libraries and librarians strengthen our state.

—The editors

REFERENCES

Klinenberg, Eric. 2018. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequity, Polarization and the Decline of Civic Life*. New York: Broadway Press.

1 <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol22/iss1/>

2 Klinenberg discusses libraries throughout the book along with other public spaces. In particular, see the conclusion “Before We Lift The Next Shovel,” pages 209–233.