

**LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND**  
**The regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held**  
**December 11, 2023**  
**at William Hall Library**  
**Auditorium, Lower Level**  
**1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905**

**Members Attending:** John Bucci, Aaron Coutu-Jones, Jessica David, Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Laura Kohl, Christopher La Roux, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Doug Norris, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran, Kate Wodehouse

**Members Absent:** Monica Nazareth-Dzialo

**Present from the Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS):** Karen Andrews, Nicolette Baffoni, and Karen Mellor

**Guests:** None

**Materials Distributed:**

- RI Public Library Annual Survey 2023 – Preliminary Staffing Data (12/11/2023)

**I. WELCOME**

Ms. Drnach called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm.

**II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES** from the November 20, 2023, meeting

**Moved By:** Ms. Kohl

**Seconded By:** Mr. Coutu-Jones

The minutes were approved as amended in Section VIII, Item A.

**III. REPORT OF THE CHAIR**

Ms. Drnach invited attendees to introduce themselves and their library affiliation.

**IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT**

**A. OLIS Updates**

**i. FY25 Proposed State Aid to Libraries**

Ms. Mellor submitted proposed FY25 state grant-in-aid (GIA) to the state budget office. Proposed aid is based on GIA applications submitted in the 2023 data collection cycle. The November board discussion about aid adjustment for libraries in economically challenged communities to accommodate disproportionate Ocean State Libraries (OSL) annual fee increases was not included in the proposal. Ms. Mellor followed the state’s statutory formula for apportioning GIA at 25% of local expenditures; level-funding for state aid was not submitted.

ii. OLIS Budget

OLIS' budget was submitted at the current service level, which will include contractual pay increases. OLIS realized a small increase in its FY23 federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) award, which will be expended in state fiscal year 2024.

iii. Library Construction Projects

Construction projects in Jamestown and Narragansett are anticipated to be completed in January 2024. Ms. Mellor proposed that a future board meeting be held at one of the completed libraries.

OLIS has participated in discussions with Middletown and Foster libraries about potential new library construction projects.

iv. Enterprise Technology Strategy and Services (ETSS) Report

Ms. Mellor submitted an annual report to ETSS this month about OLIS accomplishments in 2023. Use of Talking Books Library (TBL) services has decreased as seniors were substantially impacted by the pandemic. TBL circulation has increased since the earlier part of the pandemic but is still down 8% from 2019. The number of members has decreased 33% from 2022, largely due to a comprehensive review and purging of inactive members; TBL currently serves approximately 1,000 Rhode Islanders. OLIS will undertake an outreach campaign targeting populations who could potentially utilize and benefit from the service.

Eligibility criteria has expanded in recent years to include more than blind, visually impaired, or physically disabled individuals. Formerly, only doctors could certify individuals for certain qualifying conditions such as a reading disability; however, other qualified individuals may now certify individuals with reading or perceptual disabilities. TBL staff routinely visit the RI Veterans Home, VA Hospital, and senior centers and works with libraries to reach potential users. TBL also works with state Services for the Blind and local non-profits. Please submit additional outreach recommendations to Ms. Mellor.

As the current patron population ages, more technically savvy users will be eligible for the service, however, they may choose to use other types of services to which they are already accustomed. Members recommended In-Sight Vision Rehabilitation, the Ocean State Center for Dependent Living, and TechACCESS of RI as additional resources. Ms. Drnach inquired if community liaisons are identified at assisted living centers. Ms. Mellor advised TBL regularly sends flyers to assisted living centers and nursing homes to introduce available resources, though it is often challenging for these facilities to designate staff to serve as a liaison for residents needing such services. LBRI member Ms. Nazareth-Dzialo represents Users of the Talking Books Library on the board but is no longer available to serve; Ms. Mellor will be seeking a new appointment to represent this user group.

v. Continuing Education (CE) (Ms. Baffoni)

CE programs and attendance were down slightly this year, potentially due to a greater focus on fewer, but more in-depth programs. OLIS' asynchronous Online Learning Center through Niche Academy saw less activity. OLIS is adding courses to the online catalog including a

strategic planning course developed by Thriving Libraries that will focus on community centered planning.

Ms. Goodman, Adult Services Coordinator, is curating content for the platform and reviewing accounts usage. There are currently 365 system users who logged 1,000+ sessions on the platform. OLIS also provides limited access to select high interest courses offered by Library Journal. OLIS surveys CE attendees after sessions and solicits program requests to help identify future programming opportunities.

vi. AskRI Promotion

OLIS is working with Ocean State Libraries on targeted AskRI promotions through the OSL catalog. AskRI has also submitted several promotional articles to the RI Department of Education's Field Memo that is distributed to educators and administrators.

## V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

### A. Federal & State Legislative Updates (Mr. Coutu-Jones)

Federal and State legislation about libraries may be found on the OLIS legislation [webpage](#).

#### i. Rhode Island Legislation

A non-promoted legislative bill was proposed to require all RI districts to submit a specific budget to defend against censorship. Mr. Coutu-Jones does not believe the bill will advance.

#### ii. Federal Legislation

No federal legislation was discussed.

## VII. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

No board member reports.

## VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

### A. [Public Library Minimum Standards](#)

The sub-committee for Public Library Minimum Standards will meet on December 18. External committee members are Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library, Laurel Clark, Director, South Kingstown Public Library, Catherine Damiani, Director, Tiverton Public Library, and Heather Field, Director, Ashaway Free Library in Hopkinton. Board committee members are Ms. Drnach, Ms. Mellor, Mr. Tran, Mr. Bucci, Mr. La Roux, Ms. Page, Ms. Steever, Mr. Coutu-Jones, and Ms. Space.

## VIII. NEW BUSINESS

### A. Public Library Survey Data Discussion

Ms. Mellor reviewed library staffing data from the FY23 Public Library Annual Survey that will be published online in January with other survey and circulation data. Many libraries have reported that it is difficult to fill certain positions and that libraries are understaffed.

1,026 full time equivalent (FTE, defined as 35 hours per week) and part-time library staff were reported, a slight decrease from 2019's reported overall figure of 1,044. There were 709 FTE employees reported; a slight increase from 2019. There are 269 certified librarians, an increase from 230 in 2019. The average ratio of librarians to community is 1 to 1,690 residents. The highest ratio of library staff to residents is in populations under 5,000 and the lowest is in populations between 5,000-10,000.

Community Libraries of Providence has the highest number of FTE staff at 80.6, Providence Public Library employs 59 FTEs, and Cranston Public Library employs 46 FTEs. Davisville Free Library employs 1.5 FTEs. East Providence Public Library spends the highest portion of their budget (84%) on staffing while Providence Public Library spends the lowest (53%), though the actual amount spent on staff is the highest overall of any library. Small libraries spend the least amount of money on staff.

Providence Public Library's total staff expenditure is \$3.9 million for 63 FTEs, and the Community Libraries of Providence spends \$3.4 million on 82 FTEs. Davisville Free Library spends \$51K. The average director salary is \$40.00 per hour and the highest is \$85. Larger municipalities pay the highest salaries while smaller libraries pay the least.

The Community Libraries of Providence has 29.5 master's in library science (MLS) degreed librarians, Cranston Public Library has 21, and Providence Public Library has 16. Clark Memorial Library in Richmond and Willett Free Library in North Kingstown both have less than 1 FTE MLS staff member. Both libraries meet library minimum standards for MLS requirements based on FTE requirements for their community.

Ms. Drnach inquired if statistics indicate patrons or community population. Ms. Mellor advised data is based on municipal populations, not cardholders, as libraries are obligated to serve all members of a community: approximately 33% of Rhode Islanders hold library cards. OLIS and OSL worked on a mapping project to determine allocation of population to libraries in communities with more than one independent library; Kelly Metzger, OLIS State Data Coordinator, will provide more information on the mapping project at a future meeting. More statistical data from the annual survey will be presented to the board as it becomes available.

## B. Resource Sharing and School Libraries Discussion

Ms. Steever provided information on school library resource sharing. The RILINK online catalog does not have a functional inter-district interlibrary loan feature, making the interlibrary loan process among school libraries a cumbersome and ineffective process. Resource sharing with public libraries, which is mediated by OLIS and involves schools using OLIS-issued cards to borrow materials from public libraries, is also cumbersome: requested books are shipped to OLIS first and must be redirected to the requesting school library. OLIS school delivery consists of school hubs and satellites where a hub school receives delivery and distributes materials to satellite schools. As many schools only have once or twice a week delivery, the amount of time to get a book to OLIS and then to the school does not adequately serve student needs. Furthermore, several districts are reducing the frequency of inter-school delivery, adding to the time it takes for a book to get to the borrower. The combination of these issues has reduced the number of school libraries participating in resource, based on an informal survey,

only 27 school libraries participate in resource sharing, and it is likely fewer schools will participate in the future.

Ms. Mellor reported that OLIS has seen a large decline in school library interlibrary (ILL) participation. It has been reported that many school libraries have extremely limited budgets for collection development, that school librarians are teaching more classes, and that library assistants are being eliminated or reduced; as a result, there is less time being available to perform library functions.

Discussion of resource sharing challenges for school libraries will be continued.

#### **IX. PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment.

#### **X. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2024, from 4:00 – 5:30 p.m., at William Hall Library, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

#### **XI. ADJOURNMENT**

**Moved By:** Ms. Space

**Seconded By:** Mr. Coutu-Jones

The meeting adjourned at 5:28 p.m.