

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
The regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
January 13, 2025
at William Hall Library
Program Room, Lower Level
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

Members Attending: Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), John Bucci, Jessica David, Melody Drnach (Chair), Laura Kohl, Christopher LaRoux, Doug Norris, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Tien Tran, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Kenneth Findlay, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Monica Nazareth-Dzialo, Karisa Tashjian

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

Guests: Laurel Clark, Director, South Kingstown Public Library; Chair, Public Library Standards Committee

Materials Distributed: None

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES from the December 13, 2024, meeting

Moved By: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Mr. Norris

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE-CHAIR

Mr. Coutu introduced Laurel Clark, Director of the South Kingstown Public Library, and Chair of the Public Library Standards Committee.

Mr. Coutu expressed his gratitude to Ms. Drnach for her many years of LBRI service.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

Ms. Shirley Long, previous Director of the South Kingstown Public Library, a long-term staff member at Providence Public Library, and former LBRI member representing medium and large libraries, passed away in December. Ms. Mellor acknowledged Ms. Long's many contributions to the work of the board and library services statewide.

i. Governor's State of the State Address

Governor McKee will give the State of the State address tomorrow night. The state budget will be released later this week. OLIS anticipates grant-in-aid (GIA) to be level-funded at 24%

of municipal funding. Ms. Mellor will advise about GIA and OLIS funding when the information is available. Information will also be posted online.

ii. Federal Budget

The continuing resolution for the 2025 federal budget was extended in December and will now expire on March 14. OLIS will not be awarded Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding for 2025 until the budget is passed. If a budget is enacted in March, OLIS should receive notice of its 2025 allocation in April, more than 6 months into the federal fiscal year. The award will run through September 2026; OLIS generally spends its federal funds during the state fiscal year that falls entirely within the award period, in this case state fiscal year 2026 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026). If the Senate's proposed reduction of \$2.8 million to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Grants-to-States program passes, OLIS will receive a small decrease in LSTA funds. OLIS will receive a larger decrease if the House's proposed reduction passes. The prior Grants-to-States budget was \$180 million of which OLIS received \$1.4 million.

IMLS funding was recommended for elimination each year of the last Trump administration. Ms. Mellor anticipates similar recommendations under the current administration but noted that strong bipartisan support in Congress preserved and even increased funding during the previous Trump administration. If a federal agency is eliminated, they are given 2-years and a budget to shut down the services of the agency.

Ms. Mellor is the co-chair of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) Public Policy Committee which is coordinating the 'Voices For Libraries' advocacy event scheduled for March 3-6 in Washington. Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Libraries, and Chairman of the ALA Committee on Legislation, will attend as Ms. Mellor's guest, representing RI libraries. The American Library Association is holding a similar event in April and is coordinating strategy with COSLA.

iii. State Program Report

The annual State Program Report on LSTA expenditures is due to the IMLS on January 28; highlights of the submitted report will be presented at the February meeting. The IMLS State Library Administrative Agency Survey that collects data on OLIS expenditures, library services, grant awards, and other operations, a biennial report, is also conducted this year and is due in April.

iv. National Library Service

The National Library Service (NLS), a service of the Library of Congress, provides materials and equipment for OLIS' Talking Books Library (TBL) for the blind and print-disabled. NLS instituted a policy this summer requiring parental permission for new and current users under 18 who are enrolled or wish to enroll in the service. Effective as of October 1, 2024, parental permission must be secured by January 1, 2025, for any members who are minors. Three states (Connecticut, Montana, and Vermont) have existing laws that allow minors to receive a library card without parental permission and the new policy violates those states' laws. The states are working with the federal government on the issue.

TBL currently has 14 minor patrons and will seek parental permission for policy compliance. Minor children in Rhode Island may apply for an Ocean State Libraries (OSL) library card without parental permission at the age of 13 but there is no state law that governs when a minor child may receive a library card. In compliance with the NLS policy, 4 minor patrons have been suspended because OLIS was unable to contact the parents to sign the parental acknowledgement form. OLIS has notified NLS of its disagreement with this policy and the inequity and misalignment with public library services for non-disabled youth.

v. Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants (Ms. Baffoni, Ms. Mellor)

OLIS has funds available for grants and/or statewide initiatives and will fund Spring and Summer rounds of Professional Field Experience (PFE) grants in partnership with the URI Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS). OLIS has matched 10 students with public libraries for the 135-hour library internships.

Summer Reading program (SRP) mini grants will be available this summer to public libraries for supplies or services that meet eligibility criteria. The Library Development team will also conduct a pilot program with a small number of libraries that explores a different approach to summer reading grants to reduce the administrative burden on libraries. If successful, OLIS anticipates developing a menu of grant choices with the assistance of libraries and program providers.

Mr. Coutu noted the SRP process is onerous because of duplicate data entry and that staff time expended in applying for and reporting on awards exceeds their value. Ms. Baffoni requested Mr. Coutu provide OLIS with feedback.

Ms. Mellor noted that SRP participation is decreasing and suggested the formation of an advisory group to explore youth program engagement focused on reading. Ms. Steever noted that some schools no longer require summer reading, and Ms. Space reported that school reading lists had been a big driver of the SRP.

OLIS anticipates opening a limited LORI grant program in February. The board was asked for possible grant program suggestions. Mr. Tien recommended a library material purchasing grant. Ms. Mellor noted that OLIS is considering such a program due to the success of several recent LORI mini grants focused on collection development.

vi. Early Literacy Calendars

OLIS is distributing Public Library Association (PLA) early literacy calendars to libraries; a series of continuing education sessions will support discussion of early literacy activities based on the calendar.

vii. LBRI Board Member Appointments

Some member's terms have expired and members with conflicts should contact Ms. Mellor. Successor recommendations are welcomed. New member appointments will be advanced in the current legislation session.

B. Digital Public Library of America

The Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) is undergoing changes and operations will be transferred to a new organization, but this information has not been made public. Because of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the project, OLIS will continue its efforts to create a digital library for Rhode Island in partnership with Brown University and the Providence Public Library but will not join DPLA at this time. The digital library will be developed in accordance with DPLA requirements to be prepared for potential future integration with DPLA or any successor organization.

Brown University agreed to host the project on its Omeka platform and the project will continue with the work completed to date. A community announcement will be forthcoming when architecture and process has been clearly defined.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Federal & State Legislative Updates (OLIS website [updates](#))

A. State Legislation

Mr. Coutu noted the general assembly has convened and no library legislation is currently proposed. Ms. Space reported the 2025 RI Library Association (RILA) agenda will advocate for 25% GIA funding and "Freedom to Read" legislation to protect against censorship; the bill also includes language to protect authors, librarians, and school librarians from obscenity prosecution related to content creation and library collections. RILA is not actively supporting legislation on eBook pricing. School librarians put forth a bill requiring certified librarians in every school.

Ms. David requested RILA agenda talking points from Ms. Space and inquired if RILA has considered their own legislative advocacy event like the ALA fly-in event. Ms. Space reported that Representatives Morales and Stewart are planning an advocacy press conference, and a broad library coalition is being formed; interested members should inform Ms. Space who will connect them with the coalition coordinator. Ms. Space and Mr. Coutu reported that in the current political climate, certain national groups are meeting with philosophically aligned legislators to target transgender rights and alleged pornography in schools and public libraries.

Ms. Mellor noted that libraries and library advocates should make the case for libraries with RI legislators. Ms. David noted that non-library advocates are needed to defend libraries. Mr. Coutu noted the RI Council of Churches are planning library advocacy meetings with legislators in Warwick and Cumberland. Ms. Space recommended adding student testimony to the planned legislative meetings. Mr. Bucci inquired if this issue should be elevated above 25% GIA funding advocacy. Ms. Space acknowledged that the issue should be elevated above other issues because freedom to read is the highest priority. Ms. Drnach recommended reaching out to all municipal councils for support, regardless of political affiliation.

B. Federal Legislation

No federal legislation was discussed.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Motion to Move Agenda Item VII to Item VI

Moved by: Ms. Page

Seconded by: Ms. David

A. Public Library Minimum Standards: Updates

Ms. Clark appreciates being part of the public library minimum standards project and thanked OLIS for their assistance and the inclusion of all libraries in the process. Ms. Mellor thanked Ms. Clark for her stewardship of the project and processes, and thanked Mr. Bucci, Mr. Coutu, Mr. LaRoux, Ms. Page, Ms. Space, Ms. Steever, and Mr. Tran for serving on the subcommittee. A revisions draft was distributed at the public library directors' meeting on January 9; approximately 75% of public libraries were in attendance. Ms. Mellor received email from two small libraries who could not attend; the emails will be shared at the next meeting. The board reviewed the standards revisions.

A big issue for small libraries is the higher requirement of 35 open hours for all small libraries. The Davisville Free Library (DPL) in North Kingstown (NK) does not have funds for additional hours or staff. Ms. Baffoni inquired about the 35-hour minimum requirement rationale. Ms. Mellor advised the requirement is based on a standard full-time equivalent (FTE) work week.

North Kingstown has 3 small libraries, but the Town of North Kingstown recognizes and funds only North Kingstown Free Library (NKI). DPL and Willett Free Library (WIL) in NK receive community grants, but they are not ongoing operating grants. NKI shares a portion of the GIA allotment with DPL and WIL through an agreement established by a previous NKI director. This situation represents the challenge of small independent libraries in a community with a large municipal library. Ms. Mellor noted that efforts to merge small libraries together or with larger libraries, or resistance to such efforts, often comes from library boards, and that Foster, Cranston, and South Kingstown successfully integrated a number of small libraries into a single system. Mr. Coutu noted the resistance is also often from municipalities that do not wish to take on responsibility for additional buildings.

The only new staffing requirement is for technical support with specified hourly minimums. Ocean State Libraries (OSL) provides some technical support but not hands-on repair or patron support. Some municipalities provide technology support. Small libraries are concerned about staffing such a position. Ms. Mellor noted that technology support could be from the municipality or an outside entity and does not necessarily require additional staff but may require additional investment.

The added trustee training requirements were also an area of concern for many libraries at the Directors' meeting. OLIS has committed to providing training and certification of attendance at training and provides synchronous and asynchronous training opportunities; it was also suggested that OLIS investigate a 'United For Libraries' external training subscription. Ms. Space recommended the RI Foundation that offers free training for boards. A 20-hour educational requirement was added for professional library staff.

Ms. Space noted her extreme concern about libraries being attended by one person because of security and safety issues. Mr. Tran noted the requirement must be considered because it's not

always feasible for small libraries to have two staff members at the library. Mr. Coutu noted the responsibility for potential adverse incidents resides with the director and library boards if only 1 person staffs a library. Ms. Mellor noted that 2 paid staff members must be scheduled to be in the library; further language could be added to reflect that under unforeseen circumstances (illness, family emergencies) directors may have the discretion to open the library but would be responsible should an emergency occur with a single staffer situation. Ms. Space noted that incidents resulting from patrons are increasing, and that staff are anxious. Mr. Coutu and Ms. Space noted their branches close if they cannot be staffed by 2 employees.

Ms. David inquired if there could be separate standards for small libraries because they have unique circumstances. Ms. Mellor advised that separate standard levels have been discussed but if libraries provided a lesser level of service, it would follow that they would receive less funding. However, the current law does not provide for different levels of funding and that would not resolve the issue. A more viable option for some small libraries would be merging with another library. Ms. Clark suggested a focus group to study merging multiple libraries into one library. Mr. Coutu asked about initiating library merger conversations. Ms. Mellor advised that mergers need to be driven by libraries. Ms. Clark inquired if a one-time incentive could be offered to encourage multiple libraries to merge. Ms. Mellor advised that this could be investigated.

One more library meeting will be scheduled in South County to gather additional feedback and the committee will meet once more to discuss additional changes. A draft will be presented for a possible vote in February. Following that, the standards will be moved to the regulatory process which would include a hearing. Any additional input OLIS gathers will be provided to the board for consideration.

VII. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Steever

Ms. Steever reported the RI Department of Education (RIDE) posted an [educator shortage list](#) that includes school librarians and all school specialists. Teacher positions without shortages are elementary, social studies, and English. RIDE is now offering a 7-year renewal certificate.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for February 10, 2025, 4-5:30pm, at William Hall Library, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Mr. Tien

Seconded By: Ms. Page

The meeting adjourned at 5:36 p.m.