

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
The regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
February 10, 2025
at William Hall Library
Program Room, Lower Level
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

Members Attending: Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), John Bucci, Melody Drnach (Chair), Christopher La Roux, Doug Norris, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Jessica David, Kenneth Findlay, Laura Kohl, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Monica Nazareth-Dzialo, Leslie Page

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

Guests: None

Materials Distributed:

- State Program Annual Report Review
- Davisville Free Library Letter, Proposed Changes to Public Library Minimum Standards, 2/4/2025
- Willett Free Library Letter, Proposed Changes to Public Library Minimum Standards, 1/8/2025

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:05 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES from the January 13, 2025, meeting

Moved By: Ms. Drnach

Seconded By: Mr. Norris

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE-CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

i. Library Statistics Working Group (LSWG) Conference

Ms. Mellor and Kelly Metzger, Data Coordinator, attended the January LSWG meeting in Louisville, KY. Ms. Mellor & Ms. Metzger are members of the LSWG group comprised of data researchers, 5 data coordinators, and 5 state library agency chiefs. The group advises the Institute of Museum and Library Services on the conduct of national library and state library agency data collections, helping to ensure the quality and relevance of data used to inform policy and practice.

The group discussed various elements of the Public Library Survey, including the possibility of removing collection of data relating to reference transactions due to inconsistency in data reporting and differing interpretations of the definition for the data element.

ii. LibLearnX Conference

Ms. Mellor attended the January mid-winter American Library Association (ALA) LibLearnX meeting in Phoenix, AZ. The meeting included programs about trends, and developments in library service and provided opportunities for networking with other library professionals.

iii. RI State Budget

The state budget was released. Public library grant-in-aid (GIA) was level-funded at \$10.2 million. OLIS was funded at the current service level, with allowances for staff raises that do not affect the programming budget.

iv. Federal Grant Freeze

Ms. Mellor communicated with Senator Jack Reed's office and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to determine what actions were being taken to stop the freeze on federal grants; the order to freeze grants was eventually rescinded due to questions about the legality of the order. Federal funds comprise 45% of OLIS' budget, and 10 of 13 staff are paid with a mix of federal and state funds. OLIS immediately requested as much of a grant drawdown as possible in accordance with federal regulations. The amount was not substantial because funds must be spent within 30 days. The grant expires in September 2025, with a remaining balance of \$810,000.

The state is gathering information about all federally funded state programs in preparation for further actions. The RI Attorney General in collaboration with attorneys general from across the country filed a lawsuit in RI district court to challenge the legality of withholding committed federal funds. The IMLS advised OLIS to continue programming as usual. Programs will be accelerated including the Summer Reading Program (SRP) that will be managed as in 2024. Library directors have also been encouraged to execute grant agreements quickly to encumber funds. OLIS is monitoring actions by the federal government on an ongoing basis. In the prior Trump administration, grant fund expenditures were not allowed for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. OLIS includes DEI elements in its strategic plan and has discussed the implication of these elements with the IMLS.

Ms. Drnach noted the concern that woke idealism in the Department of Education could impact library funding. Ms. Mellor reported that the President fired the national archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration.

v. Voices For Libraries, March 6, 2025

The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) library advocacy event, 'Voices For Libraries', takes place on March 6 in Washington, DC. Approximately 150 participants from 37 states will visit congressional offices to advocate for libraries. Ms. Mellor co-chairs COSLA's public policy advocacy group coordinating the event.

vi. RI Center for the Book, Reading Across RI (RARI) Book Launch

Ms. Mellor attended the 2025 RARI book launch with Ms. Space on February 1; this year's book is *There's Always This Year* by Hanif Abdurraqib. Rhode Island has a unique place in basketball history with North Providence community leagues producing notable players. Contact Mr. Bucci for books.

vii. Kids' Reading Across RI (KRARI) (Ms. Baffoni)

Multiple works will be highlighted this year to provide for different reading levels, and several summer events will be planned with highlighted author/illustrator Oge Mora. The KRARI kick-off will be held at William Hall Library with a tentative date of June 14.

B. State Program Annual Report Year-End Review

The annual State Program Report for federal fiscal year 2024 was reviewed. Ms. Mellor and Ms. Baffoni prepared the report and submitted it to the IMLS on January 28, 2025. The federal fiscal reporting period was October 2023 to September 2024. This was the first time that reporting was done on OLIS' current five-year strategic plan (2023-2027) as this was the first grant awarded during the time period of the new plan. While some projects have been revised from the old plan (2018-2022), the overarching plan goals of Access, Learning and Engagement remain the same. OLIS was fully staffed with 13 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees during the reporting period.

The 2023 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds reported on were \$1,417,691, an increase of \$172,844 over the 2022 award. State matching funds were \$1,856,408, an increase of \$74,758 over FY23 state matching funds. Library aid to cities and towns was \$10,281,019, Statewide Reference Resource Center (AskRI) funds were \$1,123,123.

Expenditures were \$1,140,965 (34.8%) for library delivery (mostly paid with state funds), \$596,767 (18.2%) for library development, \$528,558 (16.1%) for Talking Books Library (TBL), \$303,059 (9.3%) for administration, \$217,279 (6.6%) for disaster preparedness, digitization projects and subgrants, \$190,198 (5.8%) for reading programs and subgrants, \$130,780 (4%) for continuing education (CE), \$74,786 (2.3%) for statewide programs subgrants, \$66,591 (2%) for community connectors subgrants, and \$25,116 (0.8%) for inclusion and diversity. Ms. Tashjian inquired if OLIS applies for philanthropic grants. Ms. Mellor advised that OLIS has applied for IMLS and other grants in the past and is open to suggestions. There is a state law provision that all funds received by OLIS must be used for programs, and OLIS may only spend 4% of the federal grant on administration.

Programmatically, expenditures were \$1,806,640 for personnel, \$835,730 for resource sharing, \$245,844 for subgrants, \$207,329 for TBL, \$161,788 for library development, and \$112,288 for administration. Staff utilization was 31% for library development, 17.8% for TBL, 16.9% for Library of RI (LORI), 10.6% for administration, 8.5% for digitization, 5.3% for non-LSTA, 3.4% for CE, 3.3% for statewide programs, and 3.3% for reading programs.

Professional development included 46 programs with 858 participants. The number of attendees in this area is growing because of regionalized programs and greater use of

asynchronous online learning platforms. The Summer Reading Program (SRP) 'Read. Renew. Repeat', had 11,312 child and teen participants, while over 48,000 people attended summer reading programs at libraries. Resource sharing was provided to 152 libraries: a reduction of 24 school libraries from 2023 and over two million items were delivered through the delivery service. The TBL circulated 74,336 items, an increase of 24,261 because of the availability of cartridges with multiple titles on them and engaged in 3,928 customer service interactions, with its 1,059 patrons.

OLIS awarded 42 Summer Learning grants totaling \$42,084, 13 competitive grants (7 mini and 6 project) totaling \$171,091, and 11 professional field experience (PFE) grants totaling \$32,670. Grant project areas included inclusive collections, community connectors, and digitization.

Ms. Baffoni reviewed outcomes for LORI project and mini grants. Digitization projects included nearly 100 local newspaper editions digitized at Barrington Public Library, Jesse M. Smith Memorial Library in Burrillville, and Woonsocket Harris Public Library. Digitization workshops were held for public libraries, and in partnership with local preservation organizations, and historical societies to digitize new reference and local historical materials. Statewide programs were the Growing RI Native Seeds (GRINS) network led by the Exter Public Library that distributed 4,000 native seed packs through 14 network libraries and engaged 210 attendees with 15 informational talks about native plants.

Inclusive collections included Memory Care kits for patrons suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's disease, Spanish books on CD, middle school biographies, materials for struggling adult readers, and WonderBooks for young readers. Libraries reported enthusiasm, gratitude, and increased positive feelings for libraries. Community connectors included social work services, all-abilities exercise programming, youth nature programs, and a veteran's support and learning group. The programs generated curiosity, interpersonal connections, and confidence in navigating community services.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

- H5029 increases the \$15 RI minimum hourly wage from January 1, 2026, to January 1, 2030, until reaching \$20.00. Mr. Coutu noted the bill could cause a potential problem for libraries by pricing out paraprofessionals.
- H5400 requests to fully fund public library grant-in-aid (GIA).
- S0178, The School Librarians Act, requires a professional librarian in every school. It was submitted last year and reworked for this session to address some of the previous concerns and may be further amended.
- H5399 allows schools to choose to not spend money on mandates that are not fully funded.

- Freedom to Read Act legislation is being refined from last year and its introduction is forthcoming in the Senate and House. The new version of the legislation includes additional provisions, such as protections for librarians, school librarians, authors, teachers, and museum educators, and it provides a clear definition of censorship and censorship terms. The legislation requires collection policy guidance for public and school libraries, with guidance for public libraries coming from the Chief of Library Services and for schools from the RI Department of Education (RIDE) Commissioner with consultation from the Chief of Library Services. Local authors contributed to the bill language.
- S0177 supports the right to a public education and the duty to promote public libraries. The legislation includes a judicial enforcement clause.
- H5291, The RI Childcare is Essential Act, appoints government as approver of materials accessed by minors with parental permission and allows parents oversight over materials viewed by children. Ms. Mellor noted the legislation is concerning because of its impact on minors' rights. Ms. Space noted that parents will be able to view all media accessed by their children.

B. Federal Legislation

No federal legislation was discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Mr. Coutu

Mr. Coutu reported that Glocester Elementary School is engaged in censorship of reading materials because of a parental complaint from 2024. The school principal has reformulated material access procedures because of the complaint.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Public Library Minimum Standards: Review of Hours and Staffing Requirements

Ms. Mellor and Committee Members Mr. Tran and Ms. Heather Field (Ashaway Free Library) met with directors of small libraries at the Exeter Public Library on February 5. 23 people attended, with most small libraries represented in-person or online. Ms. Mellor thanked Mr. Tran for hosting and Ms. Sue Rousseau from the Little Compton Brownell Library for coordinating the meeting.

Open hour and staffing requirements were the big concerns. Small libraries reported being able to staff the current 25 open hours, but more hours could prove problematic. The board reviewed letters from Davisville Free and Willett Free Libraries about the impact of the revised requirement on their libraries. Attendees at the meeting noted that the revised staffing and technology requirements are onerous. Ms. Mellor stated that other than the requirement for a technology person, the staffing requirements have not changed. Several directors noted that Ocean State Libraries (OSL) provides the necessary technical support for their libraries. Ms. Mellor noted that the technology requirement allows for technical support services to be

provided by a library's city or town or another outside entity and suggested the standard could be rewritten to not include an hours requirement.

Ms. Mellor requested input about the 35 open-hour requirement, particularly for libraries in municipalities with more than one independent library. Ms. David requested previously that unique standards be written for libraries with a population of less than 5,000. Ms. Tashjian inquired about how these libraries would benefit from a compromise of the standards and how that would impact GIA. Ms. Mellor advised that OLIS does not have the authority to create a separate category for GIA distribution to libraries that don't meet requirements or meet lesser requirements.

Ms. Mellor asked the board to consider if the revised open hours requirement could be changed from 35 to 30 hours to assist libraries with the transition. Mr. La Roux asked if the requirement could be used to encourage small libraries to merge, how much time is given to meet the revised standards, and if waivers can be used. Ms. Mellor advised that OLIS will assist libraries with merge efforts if they so choose, and that requirements will be phased-in to not create burdens on libraries but that permanent waivers will not be allowed. Ms. Mellor is available to facilitate for any libraries interested in merging and noted that there are library models to reference for merging efforts.

The next meeting of the standards committee is February 13 via Zoom. Ms. Mellor will provide a draft at the March meeting.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

XI. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for March 17, 2025, 4-5:30pm, at William Hall Library, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Ms. Drnach

Seconded By: Ms. Space

The meeting adjourned at 5:53 p.m.