

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
The regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held on
April 28, 2025
at William Hall Library
Lower-level Program Room
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

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

Members Absent: Jessica David, Kenneth Findlay, Laura Kohl, 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: None

Materials Distributed:

- Institute of Museum and Library Services Request for Information, April 21, 2025
- LBRI Legislation Committee Report April 2025
- Public Library Standards Draft V5
- Public Library Standards Draft V5 Tracked

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:08 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES from the March 17, 2025, meeting

Moved By: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Ms. Wodehouse

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE-CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. Status and Impact of Executive Order on Institute of Museum and Library Services

On April 4, the Office of Attorney General Peter F. Neronha filed a lawsuit in Rhode Island District court seeking to block the administration's Executive Order reducing the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to its statutory functions. AG Neronha is co-leading the lawsuit with the attorneys general from Hawaii and New York; 18 other states are also participating in the lawsuit. Grants to States awards and certain discretionary grants have been terminated in California, Connecticut, and Washington, and layoffs are pending at state library agencies in the states of Maine and Washington. IMLS staff have been placed on administrative

leave, with 12 recalled and the balance (around 65 staff) terminated as of May 4. Discretionary grants to Providence Public Library (\$53,000) and Brown University Library (\$175,000) have been cancelled. As of April 11, states are once again receiving payments for Grants to States awards. OLIS submitted a payment request on April 11 and is still awaiting payment but was told by IMLS that payment has been approved. Rulings on the attorney general's lawsuit and a similar suit by the American Library Association and the union representing federal government workers are pending.

On April 23, OLIS was notified of a partial award of its 2025 allotment from the Grants to States program; the award will provide 50% or \$707,000 of a projected \$1.4 million award, with the potential for a supplemental award later. Later that day, OLIS received a request for information (RFI) from IMLS Acting Director Keith Sonderland. The RFI requested information about any Grants to States funds used to subsidize programs in conflict with government policies as prescribed in various Executive Orders, how Grants to States funds are used to facilitate access to resources that cultivate an educated and informed American citizenry, and how the agency plans to support the celebration of America's 250th anniversary. OLIS' Five-Year Plan for the use of federal funds clearly identifies how OLIS uses funding to support the purposes and priorities of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). The referenced Executive Orders include: 14151 (Ending Radical and Wasteful Government Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs and Preferencing), 14253 (Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History), 13899 (Combating Anti-Semitism), 14188 (Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism), 14168 (Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government), 14202 (Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias, and 14190 (Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling).

Ms. Mellor will respond to the RFI, which is due on May 5. While OLIS is not a RI 250 Commission member, it plans to support the Commissions activities to the extent possible. In addition, the RI digital Library currently under development will include resources highlighting Rhode Island's contributions to the nation's founding. Ms. Mellor is working with chief library officers across the country and Senator Reed's office during this time, and with the Department of Administration's legal division and the Attorney General's office on the RFI responses. Ms. Mellor extended her gratitude to Ms. Drnach for initially connecting OLIS with the Attorney General's office and encouraging action to reverse the Executive Order.

Other federal actions are also impacting funding for Rhode Island Libraries. All funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to state humanities councils has been canceled; the National Endowment for the Arts is still intact. Senator Reed and Senator Adam Schiff of CA led the circulation of a letter requesting that IMLS funding in the 2025 Continuing Resolution should be distributed as it was in 2024, specifically that \$180 million be distributed for Grants to States.

The partial 2025 award from IMLS will provide OLIS with funding thru March 2026 and will be spent in state fiscal year 2026; currently it is unknown if OLIS will receive the remainder of the award. OLIS will announce resumption of the Summer Reading Program (SRP) grant awards by April 30, once receipt of federal funds from the last drawdown has been confirmed. Currently, it appears that funds will be available for ongoing services and salaries and no reductions will

be necessary for services such as delivery. Mr. Coutu inquired about holds management and if Ocean State Libraries (OSL) would be consulted if delivery did need to be reduced. Ms. Mellor confirmed that OLIS would work with OSL on hold balancing if delivery changes become necessary.

Ms. Space reported on her visit with Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library, to Washington, DC, for the American Library Association (ALA) Fly-In event. Ms. Space and Mr. Garcia met with Congressman Gabe Amo and the other congressional delegation's staff to discuss library advocacy and the Executive Order targeting IMLS, and shared community impact stories resulting from Library of RI (LORI) grants. Ms. Mellor and Mr. Garcia met with Senator Reed in Washington in April for the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) Voices for Libraries advocacy event.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

- **Freedom to Read Act (H5726)**

The RI Senate Education Committee and the RI House State Government and Elections Committee held hearings on the Freedom to Read Act. At the bill's prior Senate hearing, 3 pages of individuals testified on behalf of the bill and 4 people were opposed; none were opposed at the House's hearing. The bill's progress is anticipated to be positive, with a vote scheduled on April 30. The library coalition received a request from the RI Commission on Prejudice and Bias to send a representative to speak on the bill; their endorsement is expected. Other supporters include the RI Council of Churches; Mr. Coutu spoke on behalf of the RI Library Association (RILA). Ms. Drnach inquired about the continued submission of Freedom to Read post cards. Mr. Coutu indicated the importance of sending support messages to the supporter's representative.

- **School Libraries Act (H5488)**

The bill was heard by the Senate and House Education Committees. Ms. Steever reported that the mandate is unfunded so there is hesitancy to pass it.

- **Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Funding (H5400)**

Mr. Coutu and Ms. Space will attend an April 29 hearing about H5400. Ms. Mellor discussed the bill's \$10,000 discrepancy with agency estimates for full funding; a fiscal note has been attached to the bill correcting the amount, which was due to use of an early version of proposed GIA that included information incorrectly submitted by a library. OLIS corrected the information and informed the RI Office of Management and Budget. GIA bills were held by the Senate and House for further study.

The Senate and House passed resolutions recognizing National Library Week.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

No board member reports.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Public Library Minimum Standards: Review and Vote on Final Draft

Ms. Mellor reported about final revisions based on comments heard at the last Board meeting. The small library hours requirement was returned to 25 hours. Fifteen library advocates from North Kingstown attended the last meeting; some attendees made statements about the proposed changes.

In the Services section, a requirement was added for communities with multiple independent libraries to submit an annual plan detailing how those libraries will mutually serve the community especially regarding open hours and programming. The plan is to be filed with the annual survey.

On the minimum staff requirements chart, the staff requirements were clearly defined. Mr. Tran asked if the full-time equivalent (FTE) requirements were clearly defined. Ms. Mellor advised that the FTE chart defined the positions but will review to ensure there is no room for misinterpretation. Ms. Baffoni noted that the term "FTE" is defined as 35 hours and that definition is utilized throughout for specific positions in the standards.

Motion to Approval Final Draft of the revised RI Public Library Minimum Standards

Motioned by: Ms. Space

Seconded by: Mr. Bucci

The motion was approved.

Mr. Coutu thanked Ms. Mellor for her work on the standards revision. Ms. Mellor extended her gratitude to the standards revision committee and those who provided input during the process. The revision will proceed through the formal promulgation process and a final draft will be issued to the board.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

X. None. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for May 19, 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. Bucci

Seconded By: Mr. Tran

The meeting adjourned at 5:27 p.m.