

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
September 15, 2025
at William Hall Library
Lower-level Program Room
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

Members Attending: Laura Kohl, Christopher LaRoux, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: John Bucci, Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Jessica David, Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran

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

Guests: None

Materials Distributed:

- Proposed Revised 2025-2026 LBRI Meeting Schedule
- Public Library Trustee Manual 2025 - Online Version

I. WELCOME

Ms. Kohl called the meeting to order at 4:10 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES from the June 16, 2025, meeting

Moved By: Mr. LaRoux

Seconded By: Ms. Page

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE PRO TEM CHAIR

Ms. Kohl welcomed members.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

Ms. Mellor thanked Ms. Kohl for serving as Pro Tem Chair. Ms. Drnach and Mr. Coutu are traveling.

A. OLIS Updates

i. Summer Reading Program

OLIS provided the Summer Reading Program (SRP) with grants to 42 public libraries. Participation data will be available after the public library annual survey (PLAS) closes today. Ms. Space noted SRP participants encompassed a wider age range and attendance was consistent with prior years. Ms. Steever advised the School Librarians of RI (SLRI) meet today and summer reading requirements and impact will be discussed. Ms. Mellor noted that

reliable participant data could help educators determine program benefits. Ms. Space reported the Community Libraries of Providence formerly partnered with the City of Providence for 3 years to track reading program outcomes. The significant outcome noted was that K-2 students who listened to reading retained more information and advanced their skills. Ms. Mellor sits on a national data committee that is focusing on summer reading data to identify impacts of the program.

Regarding summer reading data, Dr. Lynch noted the RI Department of Education (RIDE) does not track or measure programs they do not fund; Ms. Steever noted that schools conduct learning diagnostic tests in June and September. Ms. Baffoni said the program is not designed to teach children to read, and measuring student impact may not be possible because of the program's size. The board discussed various ways libraries and organizations promote and incentivize summer reading programs. Ms. Mellor noted that student reading scores on standardized tests are low, with only about 1/3 of all third graders reading at grade level.

ii. New State Finance System

Ms. Mellor has spent considerable time working with the state's business office and testing the new finance system to ensure it is configured to accommodate OLIS' needs for federal grant reporting and drawdowns. The new enterprise resource planning system for finance and procurement, Workday, was implemented on July 1. The personnel component of the system will launch in November, transforming the current paper-based payroll process.

iii. Regional and National Meetings in Providence

OLIS hosted the national Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) Continuing Education (CE) Forum concurrently with the meeting of the Council of State Library Agencies in the Northeast (COSLINE) at the Providence Public Library on August 18-20. The CE Forum was coordinated by Ms. Baffoni, while Ms. Mellor coordinated the COSLINE meeting. Ms. Wodehouse arranged tours of the Providence Athenaeum for attendees of both meetings.

iv. Freedom To Read Act

The RI Legislature passed the Freedom to Read Act that provides protection for libraries, librarians, and content creators in creating and providing varied content. The Act requires OLIS to create a model collection policy for public and school libraries. Ms. Mellor met with Ms. Space and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library, to establish a committee to provide input on a model policy and will work with school librarians and the RI Commissioner of Higher Education to develop a model policy for schools. The public library policy will be written first and serve as a foundation for the school policy. The Freedom to Read Act signing was held at the Community Libraries of Providence in August.

v. OLIS Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Five-Year Plan Review

Library staff participated in a summer retreat to review the progress of OLIS's Five-Year strategic plan as it reaches the end of its 3rd year. The plan was revised last year to establish a community engagement project. Ms. Baffoni discussed evaluation techniques employed to identify plan progress on various projects and areas that required attention or were of

diminished relevance due to the pandemic. The group discussed leveraging staff more effectively, increasing consulting, and expanding library engagement. Other topics included library funding and aligning ideas of interest to the plan. Ms. Mellor noted that OLIS has made good progress on the plan and that it is serving OLIS well. The plan will be evaluated in Fall 2026 by an outside entity in accordance with LSTA requirements; work will begin on a new five-year plan at that time.

vi. Public Library Annual Survey

The public library annual survey (PLAS) that collects program and grant-in-aid (GIA) data, and includes GIA applications, closes at midnight. OLIS will review the collected data and develop 2027 GIA allocations based on reported local appropriations and expenditures.

B. Federal Budget Updates

The President signed the federal budget bill framework on July 4. The proposed budget funded the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) at \$6 million to close the agency. In late July, Senate Appropriations proposed a Labor, Health & Human Services bill to fund the IMLS at \$291.8 million - \$3 million less than fiscal years 2024 and 2025; the Senate bill includes a \$3 million increase for Grants to States. House Appropriations proposed a bill funding IMLS at the same total amount as the Senate, but only increased Grants to States by \$400,000. It is unclear at this point whether there will be a continuing resolution passed before the budget expires on September 30 or if there will be a government shutdown. OLIS' 2025 LSTA grant will fund operations through September 30, 2026.

Some state library agencies have laid off staff due to federal funding pauses or state funding cuts. The IMLS Grants to States program is currently staffed by two employees, down from five, as federal employees have left for other positions. However, an IMLS data convening is tentatively planned for early 2026. Federal funding cuts in education have led to two rounds of layoffs at Providence Public Library.

C. Public Library Trustees Manual

Ms. Baffoni shared a draft outline of the revised Trustee Manual. The revised manual will include information about RI General Laws related to libraries, finance and policy making, including intellectual freedom in addition to the roles and responsibilities of trustees. The strategic planning section will include facility, disaster preparedness, continuity of operations, and technology definitions. Content will be included for director hiring and evaluation, volunteers, and library promotion. Ms. Metzger, Data Coordinator, is creating a section for library construction. Governance and management will include library standards and regulations.

Ms. Mellor noted the manual will be published as modules which will make future edits easier. The revision will be better organized, updated, and contain all the essential parts of prior versions. A draft version is scheduled to be presented for the November meeting.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

Ms. Space is the new chair of the RI Library Association (RILA) Legislative Action committee. RILA remains focused on maintaining 25% GIA funding.

A. State Legislation

i. eBook Pricing: S498 and H514

The RILA Legislative Action committee will meet with Senator Mark McKenney on Monday about eBook legislation. Connecticut passed eBook legislation that does not go into effect unless another state with a population of 7 million or multiple states with a combined 7 million population adopt similar legislation. If those requirements are met, Connecticut's legislation will go into effect in 90 days. Ms. Mellor noted the RI bill determines how eBook vendors can conduct business in RI. There is a national push to enact eBook legislation in the states.

ii. School Libraries Act (H5488)

RILA is considering a revised version of H5488 to address questions received on the bill in the previous legislative session.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Steever

The RI Library Information Network for Kids (RILINK) is experiencing issues with the ILS that member schools use; many schools were unable to use the platform during the first weeks of school

B. Ms. Kohl

Academic libraries are considering Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how it functions with research tools, and utilization by students. A group of academic librarians are meeting to discuss how they will teach and integrate AI at their libraries. Bryant University is exploring Open AI on accessible databases.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Library Construction Reimbursement Regulations

The Library Construction Reimbursement Regulations Committee members are Ms. Wodehouse, Ms. Space, Mr. Bucci, and Mr. LaRoux. The committee has not yet convened due to OLIS scheduling conflicts. The Town of Middletown is seeking an increase on construction reimbursement maximums; they intend to begin construction soon for completion by the end of 2026. The town was advised that if a reimbursement agreement is entered now, the construction reimbursement will be based on current regulations.

B. Schedule of Meetings for 2026

The October 20 meeting is moved to October 27 because Ms. Mellor is attending the annual Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) meeting that week. The March and April 2026 meeting dates may be problematic and possibly rescheduled.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Board Activities

Ms. David will not attend meetings this semester due to scheduling conflicts.

B. LBRI Meeting Topics

Ms. Mellor welcomes board recommendations for meeting topics for this legislative session.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No comment

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for October 27, 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: Ms. Steever

Seconded By: Ms. Wodehouse

The meeting adjourned at 5:21 p.m.