

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

Members Attending: John Bucci, Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Laura Kohl, Michelle Steever, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Jessica David, Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Christopher La Roux, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Leslie Page, Cheryl Space

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

Guests: Eileen Dyer, Director, Rogers Free Library, Bristol, RI

Materials Distributed:

- FY27 Proposed State Aid to Libraries Level Funded and 25% per RIGL 29-6-2

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:11 pm.

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

Moved By: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Ms. Steever

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. Brown University Shooting

Ms. Mellor expressed condolences and sympathy to the Brown University community, noting that several OLIS staff members have direct connections to the University. Brown University Library has suspended delivery services until January.

In response to the situation, the library delivery vendor was contacted to ensure all delivery personnel wear clearly identifiable clothing and ID badges. OLIS will continue vendor discussions about appropriate attire and notify libraries of any delivery procedure changes.

Danielle Margarida, Youth Services Coordinator, hosted an online drop-in session to support library staff. OLIS is preparing additional resources to ensure libraries have information.

Providence College and Salve Regina University have enhanced security procedures, and delivery personnel are required to announce their arrival by phone at those locations. The

Community College of RI, RI College, RI School of Design, Roger Williams University, and the University of RI have not announced any changes. Johnson & Wales University and New England Institute of Technology are currently on holiday break.

Ms. Wodehouse reported that approximately 30 individuals were in lockdown at the Providence Athenaeum during the incident. Police allowed individuals to leave at 11pm, although the library closes at 6pm. She commended library staff for their professionalism during the situation. Ms. Wodehouse also noted that the Rochambeau Library is closed due to the incident and inquired whether other libraries had done the same. Ms. Mellor said that OLIS is not aware of any other public libraries that are closed.

Ms. Kohl reported that Bryant University has increased campus security, canceled finals, and that some students have departed for winter break. The library remains open to students. Ms. Steever said schools are ensuring counselors are available and that faculty is informed.

ii. Grant-in-Aid

Grant-in-Aid (GIA) payments for public libraries are still in progress. The state's move to a new finance system has resulted in delays due to migration issues that resulted in OLIS having to manually reload all contracts for GIA. OLIS is working to have payments issued by December 31. Ms. Mellor will notify libraries once payments are issued and provide the board with an update.

iii. Baker & Taylor, FirstSearch Service

Members of Ocean State Libraries (OSL) were impacted by Baker & Taylor's (B&T) decision to end operations on December 31. OSL relied on B&T for cataloging services through BTCat and many libraries used B&T for acquisitions. OSL has contracted with BookWare to provide access to multiple cataloging resources via the Z39.50 protocol at a significantly lower cost than other suppliers of cataloging services.

Following B&T's closure announcement, OLIS experienced an unrelated outage of the OCLC FirstSearch tool due to an issue with OLIS' user validation service. As a result of the incident, user data was unusable, requiring OLIS FirstSearch users to re-register for FirstSearch. OLIS has added clarifying language to the registration to clearly inform users that FirstSearch is a discovery tool and should not be used for cataloging; 54 users have registered to date. Public libraries are the main users of FirstSearch, as academic libraries maintain have their own instances of FirstSearch for interlibrary loan (ILL). OLIS uses FirstSearch for ILL.

Mr. Coutu served on the OSL workflow committee and reported that a new process has been established within the Integrated Regional Library System (IRLS) to conduct searches before BookWare is used. Overall, catalogers will not experience significant changes. Most foreign-language cataloging will be handled by Backstage Library Works.

Members discussed cataloging and acquisitions trends, publisher consolidation, vendor relationships, and eBooks and digital media. Ms. Mellor noted there are only 4 major book providers remaining.

iv. Learn365RI

Learn365RI, a project of the Governor's Office and the RI Department of Education promotes learning 365 days of the year through out of school learning centers. The program has been funding the construction or renovation of spaces to serve as learning centers; the project utilizes funds made available through the American Rescue Plan Act. Learning, workforce development, and tele-health are the project's primary focus. In accordance with program rules, funding is provided to municipalities.

Ms. Mellor attended a groundbreaking for a new addition at Glocester's Harmony Library on December 10. The Harmony project is a collaboration between the towns of Glocester and Foster. Foster had funds but not space so the municipalities pooled funds to make a learning space at Harmony. South Kingstown's Peacedale Library will close for three months to add a learning space under this program, while South Kingstown's other 2 library branches will increase service hours during that time. North Providence Library is renovating an upstairs space to create a classroom space, a maker lab, and computer space. Charlestown's Cross Mills' Library also has an ongoing project.

Ms. Mellor attended a wall-breaking ceremony in October for Bristol's Rogers Free Library as they launched their Learn365RI project. Ms. Dyer reported that the library is adding a maker space, a quiet space that will also serve as a classroom, and 3 study spaces for various purposes. Bristol has funding for 5 years of workforce development and educational programming.

All municipalities that signed on to the municipal compact to prioritize out-of-school-learning opportunities for students were eligible to apply for Learn365RI grants. OLIS is working with the Pandemic Relief Office to determine if additional libraries in municipalities that have not yet received grants might be able to develop space as a learning center. Learn365RI funds must be expended by the end of 2026.

v. Middletown Public Library Construction Project

OLIS received an application for reimbursement of the planned Middletown Public Library construction project. The application will be reviewed as quickly as possible. Kelly Metzger, State Data Coordinator, attended a meeting today to learn more about the project plan.

B. Federal Budget & Institute of Museum and Library Services Updates

i. Federal Funds

While budget for federal fiscal year 2026 is still not passed, there is cautious optimism about 2026 funding for libraries because proposed funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is almost level with the 2025 appropriation, and there is strong bipartisan support for libraries. While draft bills in the House and Senate align on the amount for IMLS, there is concern that the draft appropriations bill for Labor, Health & Human services is 15 billion less in the House bill than in the Senate bill. The current continuing resolution for the unfinalized parts of the budget ends January 31; the budget for social services and military

spending has been passed and funds those federal services through September 30, 2026. There is currently no timeline for full budget approval.

ii. Museum and Library Services Act

Senator Reed's office has indicated they may begin work on the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA) language in the new year. Advancement of MLSA will depend somewhat on the outcome of the 2026 midterm elections. MLSA includes the authorizing language for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) which provides funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services and its various grant programs, including Grants to States. Senator Reed also requested a national library facilities assessment study that is forthcoming from the General Accounting Office (GAO). The library portion of the GAO study should be released this week.

iii. Library Advocacy Day

The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) will hold a library advocacy event in Washington DC at the beginning of March and the American Library Association (ALA) will hold one at the end of February. Ms. Mellor will attend the COSLA event with Ms. Space and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library. Ms. Mellor is the COSLA event Co-Chair.

iv. IMSL Convenings

The IMLS state data coordinators and Library Statistics Working Group (LSWG) meetings will be held the week of January 12 in New Orleans. Ms. Mellor will attend the one-day LSWG meeting. Ms. Metzger will attend the state data coordinators meeting for the entire week and is also a member of LSWG.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

The RI General Assembly will convene in January. The RI Library Association (RILA) is finalizing their advocacy agenda which will then move to the executive board for approval.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Kohl

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) will not collect library statistics for the first time this year. The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) will continue to collect statistics from academic libraries. Ms. Mellor inquired of Ms. Kohl if it would be beneficial for the IMLS to collect academic library statistics.

B. Ms. Steever

Ms. Steever provided a link and recommended viewing [The Librarians](#), a PBS Documentary scheduled for February 9, 2026.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Library Trustees Manual

Ms. Baffoni is working on the full development of manual sections shared at the last meeting and will issue a draft before the next meeting. Pablo Morales Henry will attend a future meeting to demonstrate the Digital Library of RI (D-LORI) portal.

B. School Library Support

The board had a robust discussion at the November meeting about the challenges of a shared school library catalog, and the sustainability of the RI Library Information Network for Kids (RILINK). On December 16, Ms. Mellor was contacted by Karen Shore, co-director of RILINK, to discuss RILINK. Ms. Steever also spoke with Ms. Shore that day to discuss RILINK and the school catalog.

Ms. Mellor will seek to convene a January meeting with interested parties and RILINK to discuss RILINK and how OLIS might be able to support the organization and school libraries.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Proposed State Aid to Libraries 2027

Ms. Mellor reviewed draft proposals for GIA that is funded at the 2026 level and at 25% per RIGL 29-6-2. Some libraries received significant increases in their appropriations in 2025, which will result in 21 municipalities receiving less GIA in 2027 than in 2026 if GIA is level funded. The proposals were provided to the Office of Management and Budget.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

Members discussed a future meeting at the Providence Athenaeum.

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for January 12, 2026, 4-5:30pm, at a library to be determined. Members will be notified of any date or venue changes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Mr. Tran

The meeting adjourned at 5:26 pm.