

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
March 16, 2026
at William Hall Library, Lower-level Program Room
1825 Broad Street, Cranston RI 02905

Members Attending: Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Jessica David, Laura Kohl, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: John Bucci, Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Christopher La Roux, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio), Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran

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

Guests:

- Pontiac Free Library Trustees (Warwick): Barbara Angelone, Board Member; Linda Gill, Chair; Catherine Sharkey, Treasurer
- Eileen Dyer, Director, Rogers Free Library (Bristol)

Materials Distributed:

- LBRI Legislation Committee Report March 2026
- RI House Bill H8168
- Summary Legislation Library Construction Reimbursement, February 17, 2026

I. WELCOME

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

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES of the February 09, 2026, meeting

Moved By: Ms. David

Seconded By: Ms. Page

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members and guests, and introductions were made.

Mr. Coutu requested a motion to move an agenda item forward to accommodate guests from Pontiac Free Library.

Motion to move Agenda Item VII, Item B, to Item IV, Item A.

Moved By: Ms. Page

Seconded By: Ms. David

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Public Library Minimum Standards, Staffing Requirement, Proposed Revision

Ms. Mellor met with the Pontiac Free Library on February 9 about the proposed revision of the staffing requirement in the draft Public Library Minimum Standards. The proposed revisions are being formatted and will be submitted to the Office of Regulatory Reform for promulgation. The revisions to the current standards include the requirement for each library to have a director, youth services librarian, and an adult outreach librarian who each hold a master's degree in library science.

The Pontiac Free Library is an independent library in the City of Warwick that is not funded by the City and receives state grant-in-aid (GIA) only for the library's endowment. Warwick Public Library and its 3 branches receive municipal funding and state GIA. Mr. Coutu is the director of the Warwick Public Library. Pontiac Free Library Trustees in attendance to speak on the draft standards included Barbara Angelone, Board Member, Linda Gill, Chair, and Catherine Sharkey, Treasurer.

Ms. Mellor discussed the staffing requirement, the current standards, and the proposed revisions. Waivers may be requested but those submitted repeatedly without documentation of progress to achieve the standard will be denied. Waiver requests are approved by the Chief of Library Services and denied requests can be brought by libraries to the Board for review. Libraries that do not meet the standards jeopardize their receipt of GIA. Ms. David asked if GIA can be pro-rated for small libraries. Ms. Mellor said the GIA formula is governed by statute; the statute does not provide for pro-ration or different scales based on library size.

LBRI board members inquired about the library's organization, its collection and physical size, current staffing and hours, and the serviced population. Members inquired whether staff adjustments can be made to meet the requirement and whether Pontiac would consider becoming a branch of the Warwick Public library. The trustees and Mr. Coutu said any decision to make Pontiac Free Library a branch of Warwick Public Library would need to be determined by the City of Warwick and the Pontiac Board.

The trustees spoke about the library's founding, its funding sources and staff structure, and community events. Two part-time librarians fill the library's director position, and staff do not receive benefits. The trustees noted that the library has always met library standard requirements and spoke about the financial hardships their library will incur if any changes are made to the current staffing arrangement.

Ms. David recommended the board create a working committee to study the problem. Ms. Mellor noted the board has committed to studying the issue, and the topic will be discussed at the April meeting. Because the proposed revised standards have yet to be promulgated, the staffing requirements may be revisited for further revision. Topical information will be provided to the board and trustees before the April meeting.

V. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

1. OLIS Work Area

While repairs are ongoing from a recent flooding issue, some staff are working remotely because their cubicles are filled with equipment and displaced agency items.

2. Department of Administration Director

The Department of Administration's (DOA) director, Jonathan Womer, resigned March 6. Tom Verdi, director of the Department of Revenue, will serve as interim DOA director. OLIS is not impacted by this action.

3. Providence Journal Archives Launch

Access to the Providence Journal Historical Archive will be launched soon; links were distributed to libraries by the vendor, Newsbank. OLIS is working with NewsBank to fine tune access and to ensure the archive is easily accessed and intuitive to users. The board will be notified and a press release issued when the resource is launched.

4. Winter Reading Challenge (Ms. Baffoni)

The Public Services Group at Ocean State Libraries (OSL) facilitated the 'Winter Reading Challenge' program. Emily Goodman, Adult Services Coordinator, worked with OSL to establish the challenge in Beanstack, a reading tracker funded by OLIS and utilized for various reading programs.

Twenty libraries participated in the challenge with 1,179 enrollments. About 1,300 registrants (67%) logged-in daily, and 471 participants completed the February reading challenge. Participants logged 24,000 days of reading (66+ years) with readers logging an average of 12 reading days. The all-ages challenge had 65% adult, 15% child, 10% teenage, and 10% preschool participants.

B. Library of RI (LORI) Grants (Ms. Baffoni)

The grant application deadline was extended from today to March 23 due to the February blizzard. OLIS is offering 2 LORI grant programs, project grants from \$10,000-\$27,500, and mini-grants for \$2,500-\$7,500. The grants are for projects meeting the goals of OLIS' five-year plan. Ms. Baffoni requested 6-8 board members to review grant applications the week of March 30 through the state's Grant Management System (GMS). Members interested in reviewing grants should contact Ms. Mellor. Applicants are ineligible to review competitive grants in the program to which they are applying.

C. Voices for Libraries (V4L) Advocacy Event

Ms. Mellor attended the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) V4L advocacy event in Washington the first week of March with Ms. Space and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library. They met with Senator Reed, Representative Amo, Representative Magaziner, and

staff from Senator Whitehouse's office to advocate for federal funding for libraries and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

1. H7691 & S2812, State Grant-in-Aid

H7691 and S2812 require that GIA be fixed at 25% of municipal library funding for FY27; both bills moved to the respective finance committees.

2. H8168, Library Construction Reimbursement

H8168 will increase library construction reimbursement caps to adjust for inflation, and would impact applications submitted by libraries from June 30, 2025 to June 30, 2031, unless the regulations are amended by OLIS and exceed the increase in the legislation. Ms. Mellor said the bill was introduced on behalf of the Town of Middletown and the Middletown Public Library, but it will benefit all libraries. Representatives from the Town of Middletown and Middletown Public Library attended the June 17, 2024, LBRI meeting to request revisions to construction reimbursement regulations because they have not been updated since 2018. Middletown was advised at the time that the LBRI would address the construction reimbursement regulations following the development and promulgation of Regulations and Minimum Standards for Public Libraries.

Middletown submitted an application for construction reimbursement in late November 2025; OLIS has reviewed the application and requested more information and is currently engaged in discussions with the library about the design of the space. The project cost per square foot in the submitted application is currently \$235, which is below the current cap of \$250 per square foot.

Proposed legislation would increase reimbursement per square foot and for site costs by 23.4% from 2018-2025, an amount identified as the cumulative regional inflation rate, and then 3% annually from 2027-2031, a total increase of nearly 39%. Because the Middletown project falls within the current reimbursement caps, it would not benefit from an increase in the square foot reimbursement rate, though it would realize a small increase for site costs.

OLIS has concerns about the legislation as it moves certain aspects of the program from regulation to statute. Additionally, the statute would require additional changes after 2031 because the terms will have expired. Finally, OLIS is concerned about the substantial increases in reimbursement rates, which may reduce the number of projects that may be funded under the annual cap for the program. There is currently no Senate companion bill.

3. H8211, Department of Health, Community Health Worker Initiative

H8211 will allocate 100 community health workers to public libraries to support library patrons with mental and physical issues and provide support for housing and SNAP benefits. Health workers will earn \$60,000 annually.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. School Library Support

Item was held until April.

VIII. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. David

Ms. David is leading a project to recruit people to write supportive letters to Rhode Island libraries. A QR project code was given to members interested in supporting the project.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for April 13, 2026, from 4-5:30pm, at a library to be determined. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Ms. Wodehouse

Seconded By: Ms. Steever

The meeting adjourned at 5:35pm.