

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
April 13, 2026
at William Hall Library, Lower-level Program Room
1825 Broad Street, Cranston RI 02905

Members Attending: John Bucci, Aaron Coutu (Vice Chair), Jessica David, Christopher La Roux, Leslie Page, Cheryl Space, Michelle Steever, Karisa Tashjian, Tien Tran, Kate Wodehouse

Members Absent: Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Laura Kohl, Phyllis Lynch (ex officio)

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

Guests: Pontiac Free Library (Warwick) Trustees: Barbara Angelone, Board Member; Victoria Hittinger, Co-Chair; Catherine Sharkey, Treasurer

Materials Distributed:

- LBRI Legislation Committee Report April 2026
- Public Library Minimum Standards Revision: Open Hours Requirement
- Public Library Minimum Standards Revision: Staffing Requirement

I. WELCOME

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

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES of the March 16, 2026, meeting

Moved By: Ms. Page

Seconded By: Ms. Steever

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members and guests.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

1. Comparable Statistics

Comparable statistics from the annual public library annual survey (PLAS) were posted on the OLIS website by Kelly Metzger, Data Coordinator. Posted statistics include circulation data and trends, program attendance, funding and expenditures, and salary data. Ms. Metzger will next post an analysis of data gathered through a special topics section on programming and non-traditional services. Time permitting, she will also develop an analysis of grant-in-aid utilization. Contact Ms. Mellor with comments or statistics gathering suggestions for the 2026 survey, which will be released in July 2026.

2. Library of RI (LORI) Grants

OLIS received 25 applications totaling over \$320,000 for the \$160,000 allotted to LORI grants; a total of \$186,000 will be awarded through savings in other programs. Of the 12 mini and 13 project applications received, 10 mini (\$63,362) and 6 project grants (\$117,010) were awarded. The digitization or historical focus of 7 awarded grants complement the upcoming debut of the Digital Library of RI (DLORI) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) focus on America 250. A grant to the RI Historical Society will create traveling displays available to libraries about the Colonial/Revolutionary Era and Rhode Island's contributions to the founding of the nation. Ms. Baffoni is responding to queries about unsuccessful grant applications. Award announcements will be made this week or early next week and additional updates will be provided in May.

Ms. Steever thanked Ms. Baffoni for providing the grant applications for reviewers in pdf format. Ms. Wodehouse said the review process was easier than the prior process. Ms. Tashjian noted that the instructions to libraries were well done, but that applicants could use training on community evaluation and setting objectives. Ms. Mellor indicated that OLIS is discussing providing training prior to the next round of grants, and thanked grant reviewers and Ms. Baffoni for managing the grant process.

3. Digital Library of RI (DLORI)

The DLORI soft launch is scheduled for May 4, RI Independence Day. Content on the initial launch will include collections from the RI State Archives, the University of Rhode Island, and project partners Brown University Library and the Providence Public Library.

4. Reading Across RI (RARI) Author Event

Dolen Perkins-Valdez is the author of *Happy Land*, the 2026 Reading Across RI selection. An author event will be held at Salve Regina University tomorrow from 6:30-7:30pm.

5. RI Library Legislative Day

RI Library Legislative Day, coordinated by the RI Library Association, will be held tomorrow at the RI Statehouse. OLIS will staff an event table along with other library organizations. The event seeks to raise awareness of libraries and library services with state legislators.

6. Kids' Reading Across RI (KRARI)

The 2026 Kids Reading Across Rhode Island and the Summer Reading Program (SRP) kickoff event is June 13 at the Meeting Street School in Providence from 2-4 pm. This year's SRP theme is 'Plant A Seed, Read'. Two books were selected for the KRARI program, *A Cup of Quiet* by Nikki Grimes, and *Conjure Island* by Eden Royce. Ms. Grimes, author and awarded poet, will attend and speak at the kickoff.

B. Federal Updates

1. Federal Budget

The President's proposed federal budget was released on April 3. The budget once again proposes elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), with \$6 million

allotted to close the agency and wrap up operations. The IMLS was proposed for elimination each year of the first and current Trump administrations, but OLIS is hopeful that bipartisan support in Congress will provide funding for the IMLS and the Grants to States program. OLIS will continue working with the RI Congressional delegation on IMLS funding. A 'Dear Appropriator' letter circulated in the House garnered 134 signatures. The letter encouraged the House Appropriations Committee to robustly fund the IMLS and the Library & Services Technology Act (LSTA). A similar letter, led by Senator Jack Reed, is circulating in the Senate and currently has 32 signatures; the letter closes for signatures on April 17. Ms. Mellor is working with national organizations to rally support for the Senate letter and will contact Senator Sheldon Whitehouse to ask for his continued support. As indicated by the passing of the 2026 budget which provided almost level funding for IMLS and a small increase for the Grants to States program, there is considerable congressional support for libraries.

2. OLIS 2026 LSTA Funding

OLIS received official notification of its 2026 LSTA award, which provides \$1,415,301, \$500 more than 2025. Grant funds will be available through September 30, 2027. OLIS will work towards launching a LORI grant program in Fall 2026 and will provide feedback to libraries with unsuccessful grant applications so those interested might reapply for grants in the next LORI grant cycle. The grant program will be dependent on the outcome of IMLS funding in federal fiscal year 2027.

3. LSTA Coordinators Convening

The IMLS is continuing in-person convenings. Ms. Baffoni discussed the IMLS convening of LSTA coordinators for Grants to States that she attended last week in Florida. The IMLS conference agenda included information about state agencies' current Five-Year plan evaluations scheduled for 2027, and upcoming work on agencies' next Five-Year plan.

4. IMLS Library Convening 250, Telling America's Story

The IMLS will hold 'Telling America's Story' convenings around the country. The first is April 14-16 in Phoenix, and another will be in Washington, DC from June 10-12. Each event will host about 150 people. Library staff from small and rural libraries plus chief officers from state library agencies in states in the Northeast, mid-Atlantic, Hawaii and the American territories were invited to the DC convening; Ms. Mellor will attend and has encouraged directors of RI's small libraries to attend. The IMLS has extended invitations to Rhode Island's 30 small and rural libraries for the June convening, with all expenses paid by IMLS. Small and rural libraries are defined as those with service populations under 20,000. The focus of the convening is to support small libraries in hosting programs related to America 250, and to more broadly support such libraries in developing programming and services.

5. Senator Jack Reed, Library Town Hall

Senator Reed will host a Library Town Hall on May 4, which OLIS will convene. The meeting site has not been determined. Information about the meeting will be sent to members when it is available.

Ms. David advised that Representative Gabe Amo's district director is seeking to recognize libraries on April 24 when he is available in his district.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

1. National Library Week Resolutions

The RI Library Association is working with the RI Senate and House to pass resolutions supporting libraries and library workers during National Library Week.

2. H7691 & S2812, State Grant-in-Aid Legislation

H7691 requires GIA to be funded at 25% of municipal library appropriation for FY2027, and S2812 requires that GIA be funded at 25% of municipal library appropriation for FY27; both bills were referred to their respective Finance committees. Ms. Space and Bill Lancellotta from the West Warwick Public Library testified in support of full funding for libraries at the hearing of the House Finance Committee.

2. H8168, Library Construction Reimbursement

H8168 seeks to increase reimbursement amounts and applies to applications submitted to OLIS for library projects from June 30, 2025, through June 30, 2031, or ending earlier if the 2018 regulations are amended. One person spoke at the hearing in support of the bill. The bill will increase construction reimbursement funding up to 39% through statute and, if passed, would conflict with the reimbursement regulations. The Department of Administration neither opposes nor supports the bill. The RI Office of Management and Budget submitted a financial analysis of the bill based on information provided by OLIS, and that information was shared with the Board. The bill was held for further study.

3. H7417, Save Rhode Island School Libraries Act

H7417 ensures that every public school has a school library in a permanent and dedicated space. The bill has been held for further study.

B. Federal Legislation

1. H.R. 7661

Ms. Space inquired about federal bill H.R. 7661 (termed the "Stop the Sexualization of Children Act" by supporters) that bans certain types of books and about its impact on RI S0238, the Freedom to Read Act. Ms. Mellor reported that RI's delegation is not supportive of the bill and there is opposition by other congressional delegations, but the bill has progressed further than the American Library Association (ALA) anticipated. If the bill is approved, it may impact federal funding. Ms. Mellor reported that new federal assurances for the 2026 LSTA Award will necessitate a change in assurances for LORI sub-grants. Changes are also being made to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which governs all federal grant awards. CFR language is being revised to incorporate recent Executive Orders.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. David

The 'Library Love Letter' project attracted 148 responders who wrote about 300 letters of support to libraries. More libraries will receive letters through the ongoing project.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Public Library Standards: Staffing and Open Hours Requirements

Ms. Mellor reviewed proposed revisions to the Public Library Standards' open hours and staffing requirements and distributed materials for discussion. Libraries are required to be open for a minimum number of hours based on community size as defined by the library's legal service area. The legal service area is not necessarily based on the municipal population; it is the area served by the library. The board discussed the proposed revisions, small library service populations and legal service areas, and the revision request to accommodate small libraries that struggle with funding.

During the review, OLIS confirmed how library populations are assigned in multi-library municipalities. Under the current standards, if a multi-library municipality has a population under 10,000, all libraries combined are required to be open 35 unique hours, and each library must be open 25 hours.

Ms. Mellor noted that 3 public libraries submitted waivers this year because they cannot meet the open hours requirement (Adams Public Library in Central Falls, Providence Public Library and the Community Libraries of Providence, and West Warwick Public Library).

Warwick has 2 libraries, Warwick Public Library and the Pontiac Free Library, with the population of Warwick distributed between the two libraries. OLIS conducted an analysis of all multi-library communities with Ocean State Libraries (OSL) prior to the pandemic, including Warwick; this analysis defined each library's service area, and the numbers were updated following the 2020 census. Under the current standards Warwick's population of about 86,000 requires 64 open hours for the combined libraries, with each library required to be open 25 hours.

Under the proposed standards, the combined libraries would be required to be open 60 hours and each library would be required to be open 50 hours. The question to the Board is whether Pontiac Free Library's open hours requirement should be based on the municipal population or its legal service area, which is approximately 9,600.

Ms. Page was on the standards revision committee and said the intention of the revision was to treat libraries fairly. Ms. Space said the requirement should be based on the legal service area. Ms. Baffoni spoke about the difficulties of creating an equitable formula for legal service areas in the standards in a very diverse group of libraries. Mr. Coutu noted that the standards revision committee and its subcommittees discussed the balance of responsibilities for library services in multi-library municipalities to ensure accountability in the community and libraries.

Ms. Mellor clarified that regulations are mandated by statute and that OLIS is charged in the statute to create regulations that carry out the intent of the statute. In response to a question from the Board, Ms. Mellor stated that the statute establishes the funding formula, which does not provide for different tiers of library service. However, through regulation OLIS is charged to implement the standards to best serve Rhode Islanders. Mr. Tran inquired about the differences between small RI libraries and their specific legal service areas and geographic areas. Ms. Mellor noted that the density of the local populations impacts the service area. Mr. LaRoux asked whether the small libraries are meeting staffing requirements; Ms. Mellor stated that Ms. Metzger gathers staffing requirement statistics and most libraries are meeting them. She further noted that until recently, Pontiac did not have a youth services librarian; Ms. Hittinger advised that one has been hired.

Mr. LaRoux inquired about the revision request and Ms. Mellor said the idea being considered today is whether to use the legal service area and not the municipal population to determine the open hours requirement and keeping the staffing standards as proposed with clarifying language.

A motion was requested to revise the Public Library Standards (PLA) open hours requirement in multi-library communities to one based on the library's service area population.

Moved By: Mr. Tran

Seconded By: Ms. Page

Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Mellor noted that under a previous revision to the proposed standards, the individual minimum open-hour requirement for libraries serving a population under 10,000 is 25 hours.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

A. Victoria Hittinger, Co-Chair, Board of Trustees, Pontiac Free Library

Ms. Hittinger said that the Pontiac Free Library is a small, unique library supported by a trust. The library's biggest issue is that their funding comes from the trust and a small amount of GIA, with no funding from the City of Warwick. She noted that operating costs have increased substantially. The library hired a youth services librarian to comply with the standards, though questioned whether this is necessary for the community the library serves. She requested ideas to build a youth services program and was provided with some suggestions.

Ms. Hittinger also stated that Pontiac has two librarians sharing the library director's position. Ms. Mellor said that under the proposed standards, a library will be required to have a single individual fill the director's position; it was suggested that the other librarian might fill one of the other required positions. Ms. Hittinger thanked the board for updating the standards, lowering the open hours requirement for small libraries.

B. Barbara Angelone, Board Member, Board of Trustees, Pontiac Free Library

Ms. Angelone inquired about youth services programming. Ms. Mellor said OLIS has many resources to support youth services librarians and staff available for consultation. Ms. Space recommended visiting other libraries for ideas.

C. Catherine Sharkey, Treasurer, Board of Trustees, Pontiac Free Library

Ms. Sharkey stated that Pontiac Free Library is a 501(C)3 and inquired as to whether other libraries hold that status. She was advised that about half of RI public libraries hold that status and that OLIS would share municipal library 501(C)3 status upon request. Ms. Sharkey thanked the board for adjusting the proposed open hours requirement.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for May 18, 2026, from 4-5:30pm, at a library to be determined. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Ms. Steever

The meeting adjourned at 5:42pm