

LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
June 15, 2026, at The Providence Athenaeum
251 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903

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

Members Absent: Melody Drnach (Chair), Kenneth Findlay, Laura Kohl, 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: None

Materials Distributed:

- LBRI Legislation Committee Report June 2026
- Proposed LBRI 2026-2027 Meeting Schedule
- Public Library Standards Draft V6
- Providence Journal Historical Flyer

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:18pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES of the April 13, 2026, meeting

Moved By: Ms. Wodehouse

Seconded By: Ms. Space

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

1. State Institutional Grant in Aid (GIA) Funds

OLIS had money available in the State Aid and Resource Sharing account as a result of the state institutional libraries not spending all their state aid. A librarian at the Adult Correctional Institute (ACI) left their position, and purchasing challenges resulted in the ACI libraries not spending all their aid. The librarian at the RI School for the Deaf (RIS) left their position in April leaving a small balance of the RIS aid unspent.

OLIS used the balance of the institutional funds to purchase resources available to all Rhode Islanders, specifically by purchasing additional content for the Palace Project platform. OLIS already funds the Palace Project platform with a grant to Ocean State Libraries (OSL) and provides a small grant to fund content; the additional funds were used to purchase audiobooks and eBooks.

2. Providence Journal Archives

OLIS finalized the Providence Journal Historic Archive acquisition and launched it at the RI Library Association (RILA) conference in May. NewsBank's Providence Journal Historic Archive runs from 1829 to 1982 and includes the Evening Bulletin regional editions. The archive is available to all Rhode Islanders with a public library card through their library's website or the AskRI website. Providence Journal articles from 1983 to the present day are also available in text-only format, along with the full run of the Evening Bulletin on a trial basis through June 2027. OLIS will evaluate the cost to continue access to the Providence Journal 1983 to the present day before access expires. OLIS will own the 1829-1982 archive content at the end of the 10-year contract payment period.

3. Kids' Reading Across RI (KRARI) Kickoff

The KRARI kickoff took place at Meeting Street School on June 13. CollegeBound Savers, library organizations, and 4 public libraries exhibited at the event. Nikki Grimes, a New York Times winning author, read her book, *A Cup of Quiet*. Because of other RI events held in early June, OLIS will consider scheduling future KRARI events earlier, and will work with the RI Center for the Book to encourage more robust KRARI attendance.

4. Summer Reading Program (SRP)

Summer Reading Program advertising kicks off this week. Advertisements with artwork from the SRP theme 'Plant A Seed, Read' can be found on statewide electronic billboards until July 4. Bus placards and billboards will promote the SRP scavenger hunt to encourage readers to find the 'Good Egg' or 'Bad Seed'. OLIS purchased 'Good Egg/Bad Seed' plushies for libraries to display for SRP participants to locate as part of SRP activities.

Mr. Coutu said the Warwick Public Library is converting the SRP artwork to patriotic views for the City of Warwick's RI 250 celebration next Saturday.

5. Summer Reading Pilot Program

OLIS contracted with Ocean State Media (OSM) and the Providence Children's Museum (PCM) to each develop two intergenerational programs for eleven libraries participating in a pilot program. Libraries will receive four complete programs: two administered by OSM and PCM staff and two for delivery by library staff following their participation in a training program. OSM designed and facilitated a multi-part intergenerational workshop using storytelling and media-making to explore the question, "What book planted a seed in your life?" PCM designed and facilitated a flexible, intergenerational drop-in program inviting children and adults to explore how seeds connect science, ecosystems, culture, food, and storytelling.

OLIS staff will visit libraries this summer to view the programs and receive feedback. If the pilot program is successful, OLIS anticipates using it as a future SRP model in place of the SRP mini-grant program. OLIS provided fewer mini grants this summer, allowing libraries to participate in either the grant program or the pilot program. Depending on the success of the program, OLIS is considering moving to a model of offering select statewide programs to libraries rather than offering small grants for materials and/or programs. This shift in operations would reduce the time spent by OLIS staff administering over 40 small grants and the burden on libraries to apply for and manage grants, while providing high-quality programming to libraries statewide.

6. OLIS Professional Staff Offsite Meeting

OLIS professional staff will attend an offsite summer meeting at a RI library to discuss upcoming programming, including continuing education (CE), and OLIS' Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) five-year plan.

7. Artificial Intelligence (AI) Summit

Ms. Baffoni said that a full-day AI summit is being planned for late summer about issues specific to libraries. Libraries, the federal government and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) are interested in AI, and OLIS will provide presentations focused on practical skills, ethics surrounding advocacy and avoidance, and patron interaction. Meeting details are pending. Post summit activities will focus on training and addressing issues not discussed at the summit. OLIS is planning post-summit training with the AI Safety Awareness Project, a national non-profit organization that is already working with other states. The project offers a free all-day training session for librarians.

Ms. Mellor will be on the lookout for AI Summit speakers while attending the upcoming American Library Association (ALA) annual conference in Chicago. OLIS is targeting September for the AI summit.

8. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) America 250 Convening

Ms. Mellor attended the IMLS America 250 convening in Washington for small and rural libraries. The event was open to libraries with a service population of 20,000 or less. Twenty RI libraries were eligible to attend the event, and six librarians attended. Attending librarians were from Little Compton, Middletown, New Shoreham, Pascoag, Tiverton and Warren. A grant-writing session was available that explained how to use AI to assist in grant-writing. Much of the convening was focused on programming, for small libraries.

9. Public Library Field Service

OLIS professional staff will conduct field service visits this summer into early fall. Each public library is assigned an OLIS liaison with each staff member responsible for five to six libraries. One focus of field service will be discussion of OLIS' current and future five-year plan.

B. OLIS Five-Year Plan for Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Funds

OLIS' current Five-Year Plan for the LSTA Funds expires in September 2027. The first part of the process of developing a new five-year plan includes evaluation of the current plan by an independent evaluator. The evaluation is due in March 2027 and the new Five-Year Plan for 2028-2032 must be submitted to the Institute of Museum and Library Services by June 30, 2027.

Members of the Council of State Library Agencies in the Northeast (COSLINE) have engaged in a cooperative purchase for evaluation services in the past. This year's cooperative purchase will be led by Ms. Mellor, who serves as treasurer for COSLINE. Over the summer an RFP will be prepared and a consultant selected. The evaluation work is anticipated to begin in late summer.

OLIS will keep the board informed of the evaluation process and engaged in the development of the new strategic plan. It is anticipated that the draft plan will be available for the April 2027 meeting to allow time for revisions before the plan is presented for approval at the May 2027 meeting.

C. Federal Updates

1. Federal Budget

The House Appropriations Committee approved the proposed budget for Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Other Related Agencies. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) was nearly level-funded at \$291.8 million, a significant increase from the \$6 million proposed by the President to wrap up IMLS functions. There was a small cut to the Grants-to-States program of \$1 million. There has been no movement in the Senate yet on the 2027 budget. It is generally expected that there will be no federal budget before the midterm elections, which will necessitate a Continuing Resolution to avoid a government shutdown in October. OLIS is tracking budget developments.

D. Chief Officers of Library Agencies (COSLA)

COSLA and the ALA reached an agreement to partner on the annual library legislative advocacy event in Washington, DC. The advocacy event is scheduled for February 24-25, 2027.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

A. State Legislation

1. H7691, S2812, State Grant-in-Aid (GIA)

The state fully funded library GIA at 25%.

2. H7606, S2525, eBook Legislation

EBook legislation passed the RI Senate and House with only one opposing vote. Julie Holden, Assistant Library Director, Cranston Public Library, helped the initiative and has been working on eBook legislation for the past five years. The American Association of Publishers

indicated that passage of the bill may result in the stoppage of eBook sales by major publishers to libraries in RI. Ms. Mellor said RI's legislation is only activated if similar legislation passes in four states. EBook legislation has passed in Connecticut. Ms. Mellor noted that if large book publishers stop selling eBooks to RI libraries, eBook purchases may be available through smaller publishers. Ms. Space said that eBooks' sale stoppage to RI libraries is illegal. Mr. Coutu said that author James Patterson wrote a negative op-ed about RI's eBook legislation, claiming that it harms authors. Kyle Courtney, a librarian at Harvard and lawyer specializing in copyright, disputed Mr. Patterson's op-ed in a counter article. Ms. David asked if an op-ed could be written about the benefits of the legislation. RI Library Association Past President Ben Hanley and Julie Holden did have an op ed published on eBook pricing earlier in the year.

3. H8446, S3210, School Library Month

The school library bill was referred to a committee.

4. H2417, S2078, School library Act (Library Construction)

No movement on legislation for library construction projects.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Steever

There is an alarming trend in schools not replacing retiring school librarians at all school levels. The pace has increased since the school librarian requirement was removed from the RI Basic Education Plan (BEP). Some schools are funding library positions but not libraries, so new materials are not purchased. Ms. Steever's budget for the new year was cut by 50%, and other school librarians are reporting substantial library budget cuts. The School Librarians of Rhode Island (SLRI) are monitoring the situation. Funds for school libraries are available through the federal Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program, but the application process is daunting and the pool of funds limited. Ms. Mellor said that school libraries are eligible to apply for OLIS Library of RI (LORI) grants.

Ms. Space inquired if a bridged school catalog could support a statewide effort to provide more materials for school libraries. Ms. Mellor will meet in July with RI Library Information Network for Kids (RILINK) staff, and Stephen Spohn, Executive Director, Ocean State Libraries (OSL), to discuss a bridged school catalog. Ms. David asked if the RI Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) could be useful in procuring school library funds.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Public Library Standards: Final Review and Vote on Revised Standards

Ms. Mellor reviewed final changes to the standards. Changes were initiated to update inconsistent language, add clarification, and include information about RI's 'Freedom to Read Act'. Library pages were removed as qualifying staff to meet the standard of two staff

members always being present in the library. The definition of streaming services was clarified and specification added that a professional librarian must be present at least half the time the library is open. The hours requirement was previously changed to accommodate a request from the Pontiac Free Library and other small libraries, requiring that libraries in communities with more than one independent library need to be open 25 hours and not 35.

Motion to approve the Public Library Standards revisions:

Moved By: Ms. David

Seconded By: Ms. Page

The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Mellor said the approved changes to the standards will be formatted and promulgated through the required state processes. The standards will be reviewed again in 5 years.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for September 21, 2026, from 4-5:30pm, at a library to be determined. Members will be notified of date or venue changes.

The board reviewed the proposed LBRI 2026-2027 meeting schedule. Ms. Steever noted the proposed December 21, 2026, meeting date is problematic because of its proximity to the holidays. The December meeting will be changed to December 14, and the full schedule will be approved at the September meeting.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Moved By: Mr. Bucci

Seconded By: Ms. Steever

The meeting adjourned at 5:36pm