LIBRARY BOARD OF RHODE ISLAND
A regular meeting of the Library Board of Rhode Island was held
September 21, 2026, at The William Hall Library, Auditorium
1825 Broad Street, Cranston, RI 02905

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

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

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:

- Proposed LBRI 2026-2027 Meeting Schedule, REV01

I. WELCOME

Mr. Coutu called the meeting to order at 4:04pm.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES of the June 15, 2026, meeting

Moved By: Ms. Wodehouse

Seconded By: Mr. Bucci

The minutes were approved as presented.

III. REPORT OF THE VICE CHAIR

Mr. Coutu welcomed members back from the summer recess.

IV. CHIEF OF LIBRARY SERVICES REPORT

A. OLIS Updates

Ms. Mellor thanked Ms. Wodehouse for hosting the June 2026 meeting at the Providence Athenaeum.

1. Summer Reading Program

Over 9,000 children, 2,000 teens, and 4,376 adults participated in this year's summer reading program (SRP). Approximately 65,000 children and teens attended over 2,700 library programs, with 8,500 adults attending 750 adult programs. There was a slight uptick in program attendance from 2025 that may have resulted from SRP advertising and the statewide library scavenger hunt. OLIS advertised the hunt on RI Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) buses and digital billboards and provided participating libraries with 'Good Egg/Bad Seed' plushies for the hunt. Ms. Mellor read excerpts from several of the hundred plus positive comments about the hunt that were received from parents and children.

Planning for the 2027 SRP is in progress. The 2027 theme is 'Reading Expands Our Universe', and the proposed scavenger hunt plushies will be a moon on one side and the sun on the reverse.

OLIS conducted a summer learning pilot program with Ocean State Media (OSM) and the Providence Children's Museum (PCM) to develop statewide summer reading programming intended to decrease the burden on libraries; 11 libraries participated. The goal is to make SRP expenditures more effective by offering statewide program options such as presentations or providing training to librarians on thematic programs developed by contracted entities. OLIS is conducting a survey with participants and partners to gather feedback about the program impacts. The pilot program may become the future model for SRP programming rather than mini grants whose application and administration proves onerous for some libraries.

Ms. Space reported that, at the Community Libraries of Providence, children are issued starter packs to encourage SRP participation and funds to purchase books would be welcomed. Ms. Mellor said some financially challenged libraries who otherwise would not have applied for SRP programming grants have been encouraged in the past to purchase books with grant funds.

2. Grant Programs

The LORI grant program, which funded sixteen projects statewide, is wrapping up. The federal fiscal year ends on September 30 and grant funds must be expended by then. Ms. Page discussed Woonsocket Harris Public Library's project, which included media digitization and the well-attended city walk tours that were centered around historical sites. Attendees received QR code maps with detailed information about landmarks on the tours.

Ms. Space discussed the Community Libraries of Providence planting project and associated workshops, and the separate Artificial Intelligence (AI) certified training program that was completed by 11 librarians. Mr. Tran discussed Exeter Public Library's cooperative seed growing program that included a suite of project support materials for multiple participating libraries.

Eileen Dyer, Director, Rogers Free Library in Bristol, discussed Rogers' Memory Café project for people with age-related memory loss and their caregivers. The project included afternoon programming for participants; funds were used to purchase various types of assistance tools and to hire program facilitators. Library staff will continue to maintain and develop the program.

OLIS is working on grant programs scheduled for implementation from January - August 2027.

3. Public Library Annual Survey

The Public Library Annual Survey (PLAS) due date was pushed back a week; it is now due on September 22. As of today, 30 libraries (out of 48) have submitted their surveys. OLIS will utilize data gathered in the survey to calculate the FY28 Grant-in-Aid (GIA) for delivery to

the state Budget Office in November. The target date to complete application processing is October 31.

4. OLIS Five-Year Strategic Plan

   OLIS is required to develop a strategic plan every five years for the expenditure of federal funds provided through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). OLIS' current plan (2023-2027) expires October 1, 2027. LSTA also requires state library agencies to engage an evaluator to complete an independent review of the prior plan to evaluate goal achievement. As a member of the Council of State Libraries in the Northeast (COSLINE), OLIS participated in the cooperative purchase of a consultant to conduct evaluations for seven participating states. Ms. Mellor, as COSLINE treasurer and the senior COSLINE chief, coordinated the process of hiring an evaluator. COSLINE received seven responses to its Request for Proposals and selected LJH Consulting of Colorado, whose principal, Linda Hofschire, previously served as director of the Colorado State Library's Library Research Service and was the developer and director of the Research Institute for Public Libraries (RIPL). Ms. Mellor and Ms. Baffoni held a kickoff meeting with LJH Consulting last week to begin the evaluation process for OLIS' 2023-2027 plan.

   Select members of the LBRI will be engaged in the current plan evaluation process and the LBRI will be fully engaged in the development of the new Five-Year Plan. LJH Consulting will hold focus groups and conduct surveys during the evaluation process, which will inform development of the new plan. The evaluation draft is expected for LBRI feedback in February and is due to the Institute of Museum and Library Services on March 30, 2027. From January-April, OLIS will meet with stakeholders and develop a draft of the Five-Year Plan. The draft should be available for an April board presentation and a May vote.

5. Federal Updates

   A. Federal Budget

      There is no federal budget for the fiscal year starting on October 1. The House and Senate passed a continuing resolution that extends the current budget through December 11, 2026. House Appropriations has passed the subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Other Related Agencies' proposal to nearly level-fund the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) at $291.8 million; it is $3 million less than the 2026 budget but has minimal impact on library funding. The President's budget proposed an amount of $6 million to wrap up the functions of the IMLS and close the agency.

   B. E-Rate

      The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a notice of proposed E-Rate rulemaking. The notice is unusual because it doesn't specifically indicate the rulemaking objective. The FCC rule may lead to the elimination of the E-Rate program or reduce it to rural areas. E-Rate supports internet service for schools and libraries and is critical nationwide for school and library internet connectivity. Schools receive the largest amount of E-Rate funding.

The initial comment period for the proposed rule is open until October 13; a significant number of comments have already been submitted. The comment reply period closes on November 12. The RI Department of Education (RIDE) is filing comments and Ocean State Libraries (OSL), the RI Library Association (RILA), and the School Librarians of RI (SLRI) will submit a group comment. Ms. Mellor noted that there is value in large or partnered organizations submitting comments. Due to staff turnover at RIDE, OLIS is assisting with their comment preparation by providing RIDE with E-Rate funding data. The E-Rate rulemaking proposal is based on issues with screen and internet use by children and its alleged negative impact These concerns are not substantive for libraries or schools because federal grant recipients must comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

Ms. Tashjian said that digital equity funding and competitive grants are once again available for digital literacy programs, but that E-Rate is at risk. A bill submitted in the RI legislature to establish a permanent RI broadband office to represent broadband interests has not progressed. Ms. Tashjian will reach out to Commerce RI and said that OLIS and libraries should drive broadband advocacy. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB) are tracking the FCC E-Rate rulemaking notice and providing support materials and guidance for entities interested in submitting comments.

A federal judge has ruled that the Executive Branch cannot cancel funding allocated by Congress for grants awarded thru the Digital Equity Act enacted under the Biden administration. The judge also ruled that awarding grants according to ethic criteria is unconstitutional so entities must reapply for grants. A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) will be issued in December or January. The federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is proposing a rule change for agencies awarding grants empowering the OMB director to rescind grants at will and requiring federal agencies to vet grant applications to determine if they demonstrably advance the President's policy, priorities, and views. Senator Jack Reed advanced language in the Senate's continuing resolution to keep the OMB rule from going into effect until December 11.

6. RI Library Information Network for Kids School Catalog

Ms. Mellor met with RI Library Information Network for Kids (RILINK) staff this summer about a potential partnership between RILINK and Ocean State Libraries (OSL) with the objective of replacing the existing school library catalog. A product demonstration will be held tomorrow to view Koha and Aspen Discovery, which is currently used by OSL for their online public access catalog. An OSL committee meeting will be held in October to explore a potential partnership with RILINK that may result in a new school library catalog that would facilitate easier resource sharing between schools and public libraries.

Mr. Bucci inquired if delivery would be impacted by a new school catalog. Ms. Mellor said that school hubs and spokes would continue to be used to mitigate delivery volume increases. Ms. Steever asked if the per student cost paid by schools for their current catalog

could be bundled into delivery. Mr. Coutu noted that OSL doesn't have an individual contribution requirement for delivery with its members.

7. Election Impact

Ms. Tashjian asked about OLIS impact from the upcoming election. While some agencies are impacted by elections in that their directors are appointed by the Governor, Ms. Mellor reported that OLIS isn't impacted by administration changes as the Chief's position is classified. However, any change in administration results in changes across state government.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Federal & State Legislative Updates (OLIS website updates).

A. State Legislation

State legislation was not discussed.

B. Federal Legislation

Federal legislation was not discussed.

VI. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

A. Ms. Steever

The RI Department of Education (RIDE) is using praxis testing to make it possible for school librarians to hold an educational degree in lieu of a master's degree in library science (MLS). School library spaces are being used for non-library activities, and Newport has closed school libraries throughout the district. The School Librarians of RI (SLRI) have been unable to meet with RIDE officials and are seeking other avenues of communication to discuss the situation.

SLRI is collecting statistics on school libraries and staffing to determine the status of school libraries statewide. It would be helpful for the Rhode Island University Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) to be involved in the school librarian conversation. GSLIS has a new representative on the SLRI board.

Mr. Coutu inquired whether the LBRI is interested in requesting a presentation from RIDE about their stance on requirements for school libraries and credential requirements for school librarians. Ms. Steever said that there are not enough school librarians or GSLIS students applying for school librarian positions. RIDE removed the school library requirement from the Basic Education Plan (BEP). Mr. Tran inquired about school library advocates. Mr. Coutu said that school library advocacy usually comes from Parent Teacher Associations.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No new business.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Freedom to Read Act: Model Policies

   OLIS is charged in the Freedom to Read Act (R.I. Gen Laws § 29-9) with creating a model collection development policy, a request for reconsideration policy, and a request for reconsideration form. Ms. Mellor thanked Ms. Space and Ed Garcia, Director, Cranston Public Library, for their contributions during the process. The model policies are expected to be completed by October and once completed, OLIS will work on creating the policies for school libraries. OLIS has no authority to request that school libraries create or enact policies. The public library model policies will be posted upon completion, along with a checklist for compliance; school library model policies will be posted after RIDE has approved the final draft. OLIS will offer a workshop to public libraries on implementing the required policies, which most public libraries already have in place, but with the addition of the Freedom to Read requirements.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

X. FUTURE MEETINGS

The board reviewed the updated proposed 2026-2027 LBRI Meeting Schedule. Ms. Mellor has a conflict with the October 19 meeting because of professional conferences scheduled for that week, and Mr. Coutu has a scheduling conflict with the November 16 meeting. The board decided to cancel the October meeting and schedule the November meeting for the 9th.

Mr. Coutu requested a motion to approve the 2026-2027 LBRI Meeting Schedule.

Moved By: Ms. Page

Seconded By: Mr. Bucci

The meeting schedule was approved.

The next LBRI meeting is scheduled for November 9, 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. Page

Seconded By: Mr. Bucci

The meeting adjourned at 5:39pm