



Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

The Maryland State Library Agency Board met in regular session on Wednesday, September 10th at 10:00 AM. The meeting was in hybrid format, with some members attending virtually and some in-person.

The following members were in attendance:

Kristen Pironis, Chair

Dr. Mychelle Farmer, Vice Chair

Nicholas Brown-Cáceres

Stephen Schutte

Melissa Riccobono, Patron of the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled (LBPD)

Chad Helton, CEO and President of the Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL)

Dr. Mega Subramaniam, Associate Dean of College of Information at University of MD

Suzette Spencer, President for Congress of Academic Library Directors (CALD)

Brittany Tignor, Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL)

David Dahl, President of the Maryland Library Association (MLA)

Kimberly Cowles, School Library Media Specialist, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)

Also in attendance were:

Morgan Lehr Miller, State Librarian

John Owen, Director of the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled (LBPD)

Dr. Tamar Sarnoff, Chief of the Public Library and State Networking Branch (PLSNB)

Donna Liberto, Chief Financial Officer, MSLA

Timothy Pratt, Communications Manager and Legislative Liaison, MSLA

Renee Croft, Capital Projects Manager, MSLA

Lynae Polk, Assistant Attorney General for MSLA

Mandy Hutchison, Assistant to the State Librarian, MSLA

Absent were:
Wilson Parran

Call to Order

Ms. Pironis called the meeting to order at 10:02 A.M.

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Pironis commenced the meeting by welcoming the latest board members, David Dahl and Suzette Spencer, expressing gratitude for their involvement. Subsequently, the board members introduced themselves.

The agenda then progressed to the ratification of the minutes from June 3, 2025.

Approval of the June 3, 2025 Minutes

The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Farmer put forth the motion, which was seconded by Dr. Subramaniam. Ms. Pironis asked if there were any discussions, questions, or corrections needed prior to the approval of the minutes. There were none.

The Board voted unanimously in favor of the approval, with no dissenting votes. As a result, the minutes from June 3, 2025, were approved at 10:14 AM.

The meeting then moved on to the discussion of the State Librarian's Report.

Reports

State Librarian's Report

The State Librarian began by emphasizing the primary focus on school libraries, as evidenced by the in-person gathering at Stephen Decatur High School. School libraries encounter numerous challenges, with book bans being the most prevalent. The Freedom to Read Act was established to tackle this issue. Furthermore, the board's Advocacy Committee has been convening to explore effective strategies for underscoring the significance of school libraries and the collaboration between school libraries and public libraries.

The State Librarian highlighted several celebrations. Ashley Biggs, a staff member at the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, received the Eugene McCrary award from the Maryland Optometric Association, which honors an individual outside the profession for their commitment. Additionally, the Maryland State Library Agency is anticipating two retirements at the end of September. Due to a hiring freeze in the State of Maryland, there may be difficulties in filling these two positions; however, the agency is developing a continuity of operations plan to guarantee that the duties of both roles are adequately managed.

The State Librarian indicated that there is presently a literacy crisis within the state regarding K-12 education. Libraries play a distinctive role in this matter. They foster connections with

children, parents, and caregivers, promoting family involvement and inspiring children to read while assisting them in developing their reading skills. Regrettably, public libraries were excluded from the state's strategic blueprint plan; however, libraries will persist in their efforts to support and guide the community.

The agency has engaged a University of Maryland student specializing in public policy to collaborate with the State Librarian, which will yield research-driven evidence to support the agency's objectives and strategies. Additionally, the agency is in the process of organizing a significant, prominent statewide literacy conference that is scheduled to take place approximately one year from now.

The State Librarian acknowledged the difficulties encountered by board members across all boards, especially those on county boards. To assist these board members, the State Librarian will collaborate with a panel of directors to develop best practices tailored for board members and board chairs. The objective is to create a document that is readily available, while also ensuring that the agency remains accessible to both board members and chairs.

MSLA will be expanding partnerships with university and academic libraries. The State Librarian will be serving on the search committee for the new dean for the College of Information at the University of Maryland.

The State Librarian began to discuss the Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL). At present, the two individuals managing DCDL are staff members from the Montgomery County Public Library. The agency is in the process of drafting a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to facilitate MSLA in covering their salaries through a grant. Regrettably, due to the state's hiring freeze, the agency is currently unable to directly employ these individuals; however, this remains a future objective. MSLA will take on the oversight of DCDL under the leadership of Dr. Tamar Sarnoff, who will also be tasked with the ongoing development and enhancement of the program.

The State Librarian inquired if there were any questions or concerns; there were none.

Executive Team Reports

Finance Updates

Chief Financial Officer Donna Liberto stated that MSLA has officially concluded fiscal year 2025. The agency reported a total of \$101.5 million in general funds, of which it utilized 99.89%. In terms of federal funds, the agency had around \$3.3 million and expended 100% of that amount.

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) sets a reversion target annually for each state agency. For MSLA, this target was \$201,000 for fiscal year 2025. The agency successfully reverted \$103,700, with the funds sourced from Montgomery County retirement, DCDL, and operating expenses.

As we are now two months into fiscal year 2026, the agency's general appropriations stand at \$105.7 million. To date, we have utilized approximately 12.9% of that total. We are receiving flat funding for federal funds at \$3.3 million, and the agency has spent about 36.7% of that amount.

In the budget proposal submitted by the agency for the fiscal year 2027, MSLA is seeking to address several deficiencies from fiscal year 2026. One such deficiency pertains to DCDL, amounting to \$49,000 due to an increase in costs. Furthermore, additional deficiencies have been proposed for the Family Literacy Pilot Program, Montgomery County retirement, and the

Young Readers Program. The legislature mandated a reduction in salaries across all state agencies. For MSLA, this reduction was approximately \$182,000, prompting MSLA to request a deficiency for that specific amount. The budget submission to DBM for fiscal year 2027 is due on September 12th. The general fund target is \$105.8 million.

The State Librarian elaborated that the agency is working with DBM to secure the funds for staff that are federally funded by moving some staff salaries from federal funds to general funds. MSLA will also be requesting over-the-target requests of \$175,000 for operational funding. The agency is too small to recover the operational costs from any vacancies.

The State Library Resource Center (SLRC) will have an over-the-target request submitted by MSLA for nearly \$500,000, as we could not obtain funding through legislative means. This over-the-target request reflects the amount SLRC would have been allocated if the legislation had been approved. The agency plans to explore further funding opportunities for SLRC moving forward.

MSLA anticipates gaining insight into funding in January when the Governor's budget is finalized, but official budget figures will not be available until April, following the House and Senate's formal approval of the budget.

The State Librarian expressed optimism regarding federal funding. The Executive Branch aimed to allocate \$6 million to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which would have led to the agency's closure (the actual funding requirements for the agency are around \$290 million). The Senate appropriations committee has recommended fully funding IMLS, including additional resources (approximately \$294 million). Conversely, the House has suggested maintaining the agency's funding at \$291 million. At present, the Senate and House are working to reconcile their proposals, which are expected to be finalized by the end of September. It is anticipated that a continuing resolution will be established for IMLS, resulting in flat funding. According to a provision in the Museum & Library Services Act, any funding designated for IMLS operations triggers an automatic reauthorization of the act for the subsequent six years. MSLA has received all funding for the previous year and has already submitted requests for this year's funding. Regarding the advocacy committee's concerns related to IMLS, there are currently no pressing issues that require attention.

The meeting moved to discuss the capital grants budget with Renee Croft.

Capital Budget Updates

The State Librarian emphasized that there are two matters to address that are separate and distinct. The first is the capital budget request submitted by MSLA, which is uncommon. The second is the county library capital grant program overseen by MSLA. The capital budget request from MSLA aims to relocate and consolidate the MSLA headquarters offices with the Library for the Blind & Print Disabled (LBPD).

Per the State Librarian, MSLA has been working with DBM, who requested that the agency put in a placeholder amount of \$500,000 to get the agency's relocation on the state's capital projects radar. The agency is currently working on drafting an RFP for a feasibility study.

Renee Croft initiated a discussion regarding the county library capital grants program. The budget for the fiscal year 2027 is set to commence on July 1, 2026; however, the grant cycle started in January 2025 when the MSLA contacted public library administrators to solicit notices

of intent for funding requests. These notices were due by February 2025. The final submission deadline was established as May 23rd. The State Librarian designated a review team to evaluate the grant applications. This review team provided a list of recommended projects to DBM on August 15th. Today, MSLA will present these recommendations to the board during an executive session for approval prior to the DBM capital meeting scheduled for September 22nd.

The program mandates \$7.5 million in state funding every year for public library capital projects. Most of the funding goes towards minor renovations but the program has also been able to open 21 new public library buildings since the program began in 2008.

The meeting transitioned to board discussion pertaining to recruitment and development.

Board Discussion

Board Recruitment and Development

The board's nominating committee convened during the summer to create a matrix aimed at identifying the most suitable candidate to occupy the vacancy resulting from the expiration of member Lynn Wheeler's term. This matrix will serve to assess the existing skills and competencies of the board, in addition to determining the board's requirements. The appointment for this position is made by the Governor. Once a candidate is selected, the board will submit its recommendation to the Governor's Office of Appointments.

The board meeting moved to discuss member updates.

Member Updates

Dr. Subramaniam explained that the College of Information is in the process of seeking their next dean. Overall, graduate admissions across the nation are declining. However, UMD's MLIS program has seen an increase in enrollment, achieving a record high, while all other graduate programs have faced a drop in applications and enrollment. They have admitted 109 new students and currently have 370 students enrolled, marking a new record.

Chad Helton stated that on October 25, EPFL will be debuting 'House of 'Melo' in partnership with NBA star Carmelo Anthony's team in celebration of his induction into the NBA Hall of Fame as well as his role in the city of Baltimore.

David Dahl shared updates regarding MLA, as they are organizing next year's conference themed 'Our Stories, Our Shelves'. The call for proposals is presently open throughout September. Over the summer, MLA had a table and made a presentation at Fluid Movement, which was a water ballet addressing book bans. Additionally, MLA will participate in the National Book Festival. Mr. Dahl mentioned that MLA is enhancing their collaborations with universities and academic libraries.

Brittany Tignor provided updates for MASL. Their advocacy committee has been working with Somerset and Harford counties. The fiscal year starts July 1st, and MASL will be having new officers. Brittany was recently on MSLA's podcast highlighting school library media specialists which has received a lot of attention.

The State Librarian shared that the Citizens for Maryland Libraries (CML) will be having their annual conference on October 11th at the Busch Annapolis Library where MSLA will present their annual report.

The board recessed at 11:10 AM and resumed at 11:20 AM. Upon resuming, the board began presentations.

Presentations

Brittany Tignor presented information on school library media specialists, specifically as it relates to Worcester County Public Schools. Also presenting was Jennifer Sills, the coordinator of instruction for school libraries in Worcester County.

Kim Cowles presented on behalf of the Maryland State Department of Education where she discussed the State of School Libraries Annual Report.

The board then transitioned to discuss other business.

Other Business

For other business, the board discussed future board meeting dates for fiscal year 2026. Future meeting dates will be determined via email and will be posted publicly on the MSLA website once finalized.

Vice Chair Dr. Mychelle Farmer discussed the priorities of the Advocacy Committee. For the upcoming legislative session, there are no laws relating to libraries to focus on. One of the committee's priorities is funding the State Library Resource Center (SLRC) outside of legislation. Library legislative day will be on February 10, 2026.

Public Comment

None

Executive (Closed) Session

The Chair asked for a motion to enter executive session to review proposed capital grant projects which are subject to both the Governor's executive privilege and the approval of The General Assembly.

Dr. Mychelle Farmer initiated the motion with member Nicholas Brown-Cáceres seconding. The board entered executive session at 12:15 PM.

The Chair requested a motion to approve the proposed capital grant projects. Brittany Tignor initiated the motion with Dr. Mychelle Farmer seconding. There were no questions or discussions. The board voted unanimously to approve funding the proposed capital grant projects with no dissenting votes.

The Chair then requested a motion to exit executive session. Brittany Tignor motioned with Dr. Mega Subramaniam seconding. The board voted unanimously to exit executive session at 12:34 PM.

Adjournment

The Maryland State Library Agency Board Meeting adjourned at 12:35 PM