



Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

The Maryland State Library Agency Board met in regular session on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at 10:00 AM. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

The following members were in attendance:

Kristen Pironis, Chair

Dr. Mychelle Farmer, Vice Chair

Wilson Parran

Nicholas Brown-Cáceres

Stephen Schutte

Nichelle Stephens

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

Dr. Mega Subramaniam, Professor, College of Information at University of MD

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

Brittany Tignor, Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL)

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 Libraries and State Networking Branch (PLSNB) Donna

Liberto, Chief Financial Officer, MSLA

Timothy Pratt, Communications Manager and Legislative Liaison, MSLA

Lynae Polk, Assistant Attorney General for MSLA

Mandy Hutchison, Assistant to the State Librarian, MSLA

Absent were:

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

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

Renee Croft, Capital Projects Manager, MSLA

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:01 A.M.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair commenced the meeting by welcoming the newest board member, Nichelle Stephens. Subsequently, the board members introduced themselves.

The agenda then proceeded to the ratification of the minutes from September 10, 2025.

Approval of the September 10th Minutes

The Chair inquired whether there were any questions or corrections required before the minutes could be approved. There were none. The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes. Brittany Tignor put forth the motion, which was seconded by Nicholas Brown.

The Board voted unanimously in favor of the approval, with no dissenting votes. As a result, the minutes from September 10, 2025, were approved at 10:12 AM.

The meeting then advanced to discuss the State Librarian's Report.

Reports

State Librarian's Report

The State Librarian commenced the meeting by presenting the theme, which focuses on budget and legislative advocacy. She began with a passage from a public library survey from the archives of MSLA, that emphasizes the significance of libraries to their communities. Following this, she offered a summary of her visits since the previous meeting, which included meeting Mycal Threets, the new host of Reading Rainbow, as well as a luncheon for volunteers of the Friends of the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. Additionally, she appeared at the House of 'Melo exhibit at the Enoch Pratt Free Library which was well attended.

The book titled "Laws of Maryland Relating to Public Libraries" has been revised for the year 2025 and has been officially released, an event that was celebrated by the State Librarian. The previous edition was issued in 2022. Additionally, the MSLA's Annual Report for 2025 has been published, and board members will receive printed copies via mail, along with a [link](#) to the digital version. Furthermore, the State Librarian intends to distribute copies to Maryland state legislators and the Governor's Office, accompanied by a letter from herself and the board chair. The State Librarian commended MSLA Attorney Lynae Polk for her assistance and consultation.

The State Librarian further celebrated the groundbreaking of the Johnston Square Library in Baltimore City, marking the first library constructed in the city in almost two decades. This library is notable for being the first in Maryland to be situated alongside an affordable housing community. Additionally, a new library is set to be established in Columbia, Howard County, which will similarly be co-located with an affordable

housing community. The State Librarian discussed creating a calendar for board members that not only includes legislative dates but upcoming events that they can attend.

The St. Michael's library is set to reopen following its renovations, alongside the Friendsville Library located in Western Maryland. The State Librarian has extended an invitation to board members to join and take part in these announcements and groundbreaking ceremonies.

The State Librarian subsequently initiated a discussion regarding MSLA's emphasis on literacy and the establishment of partnerships between schools and libraries, aimed at enhancing the agency's support for school librarians and their efforts. She thanked Brittany Tignor and her school's administration for the tour of their school libraries in Worcester County. MSLA is currently working with the University of Maryland School of Public Policy to bring more visibility to the critical impacts of literacy. The agency is working with them to conduct studies on the literacy programs in Cecil County and St. Mary's County, as well as exploring policy work and analysis. The State Librarian suggested that the board may want to focus on literacy in June.

The State Librarian inquired whether there were any questions or comments. Dr. Subramaniam posed a question regarding the court injunction that prevents the federal government from closing IMLS, specifically asking if the federal government still has the option to appeal the injunction, and whether Congress has yet to allocate funds for the fiscal year 2026. The State Librarian responded by confirming that the federal government can appeal but it appears unlikely that they will do so. MSLA requested and successfully obtained all its funding in advance for the current budget year, which is especially crucial during the government shut down. Congress has enacted a continuing resolution that maintains funding for IMLS at the current level until January 30, 2026.

MSLA is collaborating with Amelia Gibson and her students from the University of Maryland, College of Information to create public policy surveys focused on the role of public libraries and their impact on the community, particularly regarding how libraries support the public during the federal shutdown.

The meeting transitioned to discuss the Freedom to Read Act.

Executive Team Reports

Freedom to Read Act Update

Tamar Sarnoff, the Director of the Public Libraries and State Networking Branch, commenced by indicating that beginning this year, MSLA is required to implement and uphold the Freedom to Read Act across Maryland's 24 public county library systems. This entails an examination of each system's collection and reconsideration policies, aligning them with the Freedom to Read Act. While many public library systems already possess the necessary language, there remains a deficiency in support for library staff. Consequently, the MSLA has developed a template for public library systems to utilize, which is presently under review by MSLA's attorney, Lynae Polk, and the State Librarian.

Member Brittany Tignor, representing MASL, noted that COMAR has not been revised to incorporate the Freedom to Read Act for school libraries. The State Librarian is scheduled to meet with Dr. Brewer, the Assistant Superintendent at MSDE, to address this matter, along with the necessity of having a representative from MSDE on the MSLA board, as mandated by law. Brittany Tignor gave an example of how the Freedom to Read Act has been implemented in Harford County as well as the challenges.

The board discussed the annual materials challenge survey conducted by MSLA, which indicated no notable rise in challenges to collection materials. However, it was noted that informal challenges are extending to other library components, including book displays and programs.

Vice Chair Mychelle Farmer expressed her support for the Freedom to Read Act. The State Librarian asked for any further questions or comments. There were none. The meeting transitioned to discussing finance updates.

Finance Updates

Chief Financial Officer Donna Liberto provided a summary of MSLA's financial status. MSLA is currently in the sixth month of the fiscal year 2026. The agency has utilized approximately 43% of the general fund appropriation, which amounts to around \$105.7 million. The federal appropriation for the agency stands at \$3.3 million, with MSLA having expended about 57% of that total. MSLA has also submitted its budget request for fiscal year 2027, targeting a general fund of \$105.9 million. The agency received inquiries from DBM and addressed them, in addition to receiving DBM's recommendations regarding the budget. Furthermore, MSLA has put forth several deficiency requests for fiscal year 2026, some of which have been approved by DBM. Among the approvals for deficiency requests was an additional \$7,000 for the Family Literacy Pilot program as well as \$220,000 for Montgomery County retirement. The Maryland legislature has enacted a reduction in salaries across all state agencies. The cut for MSLA amounted to \$182,000. Given the limited number of employees and minimal turnover, this figure was deemed unfeasible; however, DBM is advising the approval of this deficiency request. Additionally, MSLA submitted several over-the-target requests, which include funding for Montgomery County retirement and two PINS for the Deaf Culture Digital Library positions at no extra cost to the state. DBM is also recommending the approval of these requests. Furthermore, MSLA will receive an extra \$14,000 allocated for the Young Readers Program.

The subsequent step involves the Governor issuing the budget in January. Following this, MSLA will obtain an analysis from the Department of Legislative Services, to which the agency must provide a response. Subsequently, MSLA will participate in an Operating Budget Hearing in both the House and the Senate. The conclusive budget is not made public until May or June.

MSLA is currently undergoing a fiscal compliance audit by the Office of Legislative Audits, a process that takes place every four years. The auditors are anticipated to complete their work by early January. Following this, a report will be made public, which MSLA will subsequently present to the board.

The State Librarian then delivered a presentation regarding the expectations for fiscal year 2027. Operational expenses have risen by 3-5% annually and have surpassed the reductions implemented by MSLA. Additionally, MSLA has not received any increased funding for operational costs since it became an independent agency. Consequently, MSLA will be seeking an additional \$175,000 in general funds. MSLA has taken responsibility for the Deaf Culture Digital Library, requesting two PINs from DBM for which they have been supportive. In fiscal year 2027, MSLA will also be pursuing extra funding for the Young Readers Program, which has proven to be a challenging initiative to finance. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library has led to an increase in material costs, and the demand for these materials significantly exceeds both the funding they are able to secure and the financial resources available within the program. The agency is working on a long-term plan to acquire sustained funding for the program.

The agency will be advocating for funding for the State Library Resource Center (SLRC) which is currently operating at a \$1.5 million deficit. MSLA did request a \$495,800 deficiency but due to the state's financial outlook, DBM did not recommend approving it. The State Librarian reached out to the Governor's Office to see if this is a program that they can support. Obtaining funding for SLRC is a critical priority for MSLA.

MSLA will also advocate for an enhancement in the funding formula for local libraries. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) usually maintains a flat funding approach for this formula; however, the expenses associated with public library systems continue to rise. MSLA intends to seek an increase in

the library funding formula through legislative means.

MSLA is supporting two capital programs currently. One is the feasibility study for the consolidation of MSLA headquarters into the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. The other is the county library capital grant program. The State Librarian has reported that twelve systems submitted requests for capital budget funding. The capital grant program is required by legislation to receive \$7.5 million. MSLA has requested additional funding amounting to \$8,780,000.

The State Librarian inquired whether there were any questions or comments. Member Wilson Parran remarked that previously, audit reports were presented prior to the budget hearings, and agencies were required to show progress in resolving issues, or else their budget would be jeopardized. The Chief Financial Officer stated that the auditor's report is not expected to be completed before our budget hearings. Vice Chair, Mychelle Farmer, questioned if there was any action the board needed to take to assist MSLA during the audit. The State Librarian and Chief Financial Officer replied that there is nothing required from the board at this time. The Vice Chair also inquired if the use of AI is increasing energy costs and if it has been factored in the operational budget. The State Librarian answered that MSLA has not had the opportunity to explore but will for the March finance report.

The board recessed at 11:13 AM and resumed at 11:23 AM.

Presentation

Upon resuming, the State Librarian presented slides regarding MSLA's legislative outlook for fiscal year 2027. The General Assembly is scheduled to reconvene on January 14th at noon. The final date for the governor to introduce the operating and capital budget bills is January 21st. Legislative crossover day between the House and Senate is set for March 23rd. The deadline for the budget bill to be approved by both chambers is April 6th, and April 13th marks Sine Die. In terms of library legislation, there are two priorities for the agency. The first priority is the renewal of the local library funding formula cycle, which extends through 2027. The second priority involves securing funding for the State Library Resource Center (SLRC). Senator Nancy King, who is the Senate Majority Leader and a strong advocate for libraries, is sponsoring both bills. The House sponsors have yet to be determined.

For federal funding, we do not have a final 2026 budget, but we have a continuing resolution. Also upcoming is Voices for Libraries in March which is the legislative day for the nation's state library agencies. The meeting then transitioned to discuss board recruitment and development.

Board Discussion

Board Recruitment and Development

The nominating committee of the board is scheduled to convene later this year to deliberate on the recruitment of a new member, given that Wilson Parran's term is ending. The board aims to maintain geographical diversity and a variety of skills among its members.

The Chair began to discuss the advocacy committee. The Vice Chair agreed to continue to chair the committee and encouraged new members to join. The board advocacy committee will be meeting shortly before session and weekly thereafter to strategize starting in January.

Subsequently, the board moved on to discuss member updates.

Member Updates

Dr. Subramaniam emphasized the report she submitted prior to the meeting. The University of Maryland, College of Information is presently engaged in a search for a new dean, as they are currently functioning with an interim dean. Within the program, 58% of the college's graduate enrollment consists of MLIS students. The current enrollment ranges from 350 to 380 students. Additionally, the program is set to introduce an online professional doctorate program titled "Doctorate of Information Science in Information Science Leadership and Community Engagement" in the fall of 2026. The College of Information will also be hosting the board in person in March.

Suzette Spencer shared updates on behalf of CALD, which is set to conduct its annual spring meeting on April 23rd (virtual). The theme will focus on flourishing through information, belonging, confidence, and connectedness within academic libraries. CALD will also provide 4 or 5 scholarships for individuals to attend either ALA or MLA. These scholarships will cover registration fees for these conferences. The applications for the scholarships will be made available in January. MLA is scheduled from May 6th to May 8th, with early bird registration priced at \$450. Additionally, in February, there will be a workshop featuring a 2-day curriculum on the history of black librarianship. The session on February 24th will take place at Howard University, while the session on the 25th will be held at Morgan State University.

The Chair passed the meeting over to Attorney Lynae Polk to provide legal updates on the Freedom to Read Act. Regulations have been made available for public comment. In reaction, MSDE suggested further modifications. The MSDE board is scheduled to vote at their meeting next week on the re-publication of the regulations in the Maryland Register.

Member Brittany Tignor initiated updates on behalf of MASL. Stephen Decatur High School is set to host the MASL Conference in October 2026 and is looking forward to presenting the film "The Librarians".

The Chair asked for further updates and any new or other business. There were none.

Public Comment

None

Executive (Closed) Session

There was no executive session at this meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:56 AM

