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Rhode Island: State Funds Interlibrary Delivery

by Anne Parent

Chief of Library Services, RI Office of Library & Information Services

In a year of plunging revenues and drastic spending cuts, Rhode Island's lawmakers incredibly approved two budget amendments with significant effect for Rhode Island's libraries. The Office of Library & Information Services (OLIS - the state library agency), received a \$200,000 appropriation for interlibrary delivery services, effectively replacing the use of LSTA funds that had funded half this service. In conjunction with a new favorably priced vendor contract, plans for expansion in the overall number of stops, particularly those to school library media centers, are underway.

State grant-in-aid to public libraries, also administered by OLIS, had been level-funded from FY02 in both the state's Budget Request and the Governor's proposed FY03 Budget, but the bottom line was increased five percent in the final budget approved by the RI General Assembly.

"Real people spoke and lawmakers heard them," said Anne T. Parent, OLIS Chief of Library Services. Parent attributed the legislative success to the cooperation among all of the state's library organizations and agencies, and especially to the efforts that brought individual library users in to testify before lawmakers on how the library delivery system makes a difference in their lives.

The RI Library Association had launched a statewide campaign that encouraged users to send postcards to legislators in support of delivery services. "The postcard campaign to support delivery unquestionably had the fallout effect of influencing the increase in state aid as well," Parent said.

The news from lawmakers was not all good, however. The RI state library agency is situated within the RI Department of Administration. As such, it is subject to the considerable spending cuts also ordered by the RI General Assembly. These call for each state department to submit by August 1 a plan to cut two percent in salaries, five percent in operating costs, and 10 percent of all contractually purchased services.

"We hope that what was given with one hand won't be taken away with the other," Parent observed, adding that the original State Budget Request and Governor's Budget for FY03 had already called for a reduction of 5.82 percent for Library Programs from the FY02 level, eliminating funding for a position vacated and frozen during FY02, as well as reducing operating expenditures for the 2003 fiscal year.

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