

## League of Women Voters of Rhode Island Library Funding Position 2016

The Rhode Island League of Women Voters affirms the crucial niche of libraries: they are repositories of knowledge; they enhance learning for all ages; they serve as community centers. In a world linked to the internet, libraries provide essential computer access for many Rhode Islanders.

The Rhode Island League of Women Voters supports both state and local funding for public libraries.

Libraries, particularly those in urban areas, need additional funds to maintain, if not enhance, services. We support additional state funding for public libraries, provided that the state consider the following principles for distribution of funds:

- A population component
- Tax base of the community
- the League supports the state assuming the fees of statewide services of the Ocean State Network (or any other cataloging and distribution system the state sets up)

The Rhode Island League believes that local communities should prioritize library funding in years of increased revenue. The League is concerned with the impact over time of continuous flat funding.

### Background

In June 2014 the Providence League of Women Voters, concerned about the status of urban public libraries, adopted, as a study item, "State Funding of Local Libraries;" specifically, the League studied the state's formula for allocating money to local governments to support those communities' libraries.

The state "matches" the appropriations of local governments by a set percentage – initially 25%, now decreased to 22%. The result: larger, poorer, communities receive less state money per capita from this allocation than wealthier communities.(see [www.lwvri.org](http://www.lwvri.org) for full study report). The League agreed that the current reimbursement formula is unfair to poor, urban communities. The League subcommittee reviewed the formulas from other states, and interviewed key people in Rhode Island's library community.

(Two public libraries, Providence Public Library and the Westerly Library, receive state money based on their annual expenditures from private endowments. The League study did not include that endowment match.)

At the February 11, 2016 consensus meeting, League members came to consensus on:

- \* Crucial Niche of Public Libraries
- \*Funding sources
- \*Need for Additional Money to Support Public Libraries
- \*Key Principles for Distribution of State Funds to Public Libraries

*Several major issues were noted:*

1. We acknowledge the need to maintain small rural libraries.
2. While we recognize the possibility of helping "fiscally stressed" communities by paying their Ocean State Network fees (as proposed in the 2015 General Assembly session), we are concerned that this provision would make budgeting difficult for borderline communities that may be fiscally distressed one year, less so the next.
3. The League is concerned with the impact over time of continuous flat funding by local communities. (The Providence League rejected the requirement that communities increase library funding by a set percentage as a requirement for a state matching grant.)

*The League of Women Voters of Rhode Island adopted this position at its 2017 Convention on June 1, 2017. Additional information available at <https://sites.google.com/site/lwvriprovdocs/>*