



The American Library Association (ALA) staff met with South Carolina State Librarian Leesa Aikens for a brief but fruitful discussion on Thursday.

It is unfortunate that the State Library of South Carolina has decided not to renew its ALA membership. Despite that decision, ALA remains committed to providing essential support, resources, and opportunities for every library and library worker in every state and territory across the nation to help them better serve their communities.

ALA is a member-driven organization with nearly 50,000 members and has never wavered from the principles embodied in the [Library Bill of Rights](#), adopted by ALA in 1939 and originated from William Spaulding, Library Director at the Des Moines (Iowa) Public Library—partially out of his concerned reaction to the suppression of information he observed in totalitarian governments during the 1930s. Among those principles is, “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.”

In her letter to ALA, South Carolina State Librarian Leesa Aikens noted that efforts by ALA to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion, may inaccurately be perceived as exclusionary. Diversity is one of the Association’s core values. ALA believes that libraries should have robust, balanced collections that include divergent viewpoints and represent the whole community.

Similarly, ALA has been very clear that, just like all other policies, policies regarding meeting rooms should not be prejudicial or discriminatory; rather, they must be inclusive and follow a reasonable content and viewpoint policy that benefits all members, as well as user behavior policies that protect library users and staff from harassment, while maintaining their historic support for the freedom of speech.

At the request of a number of states, ALA created a two-page document on each state, outlining some of the efforts by the national organization that has benefited the state. This was not discussed in the short conversation yesterday but is likely the ‘publication’ that the State Librarian was referring to in her letter.

From 2019 to 2023, ALA and its members, which not explicit, meant members resident in South Carolina, including the State Librarian were successful in increasing the State Aid to Libraries grant to South Carolina during the five years by \$380,757 to a total of \$3,017,410. These funds from the federal government help to provide the ability to expand and support library services throughout the state, especially in rural counties. Therefore, there was a 13% increase in those five years. ALA appreciates the State Librarian and others in South Carolina for this collective effort and is grateful for the support of members of Congress from South Carolina. The document provided in the initial version used the term, “including” when outlining some of the services state libraries use the federal funds for; however, it should have been “such as.” This has been corrected. The State Librarian may have been referencing that as an inaccuracy as not all the services listed are ones the State Library uses the funds for. However, the dollar amounts are accurate.

ALA is pleased to report that it has taken seriously the concerns of State Librarian Leesa Aiken and others for the need to plan for a return to larger in-person Library Legislative Days on Capitol Hill.

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