



HCLS Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

June 4, 2025 ♦ 7 pm
Virtual

Board members present were: Elizabeth Banach, Chair; Kelly Smith, Vice Chair; Rob Mentz, Treasurer; Phillip Dodge; and Antonia Watts. Also present were staff members/citizens including, Dorna Anderson, Stacy Ashenden, Ashley Ashman, Amanda Barrett, Angela Brade, Mary Brosenne, Sarah Cooke, Nancy Czarnecki, Vera Davies, Nicole Dvorak, Stacey Fields, Cari Gast, Eliana Holgate, Allison Jessing, Kathleen Klebba, Christie Lassen, Christine LeBlanc, Marcy Leonard, Steve Lewicky, Tanya Malveaux, Brooke McCauley, Connie Molter, Nana Owusu, Caprice Paige, Gabriela Penaloza, Megan Royden, April Rusinko, Pat Saunderson, Ben Sfanos, Stephanie Shane, Liat Singer, Jocelyn So, Marie Sovero, and Ruth Vargas.

Liz Banach called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Megan Royden and Jocelyn So provided public comment. Their testimony is attached at the end of the minutes.

Nana Owusu gave an update of the Friends & Foundation of HCLS, noting that the Friends have exceeded their annual campaign goal in terms of revenue, including 104 new donors and successful branch raffles and a spring fundraiser. Three new Board members have been added. Insight180 has been contracted to help with communications. \$150K in scholarships and grants have been provided. He closed with the Adult Battle of the Books which is scheduled for October 15 at Oscar's Ale House and October 27 at Game On.

The Board unanimously approved the Board meeting minutes for March 19.

I presented the FY 26 Operating and Capital Budgets as approved by the County Council. Both were unanimously approved by the Board. In discussing the Capital Budget, I explained that the County Council had stipulated that the purchase of the Lakefront property has until September 15 in order to take the \$5M out of contingency. MEDCO is set to deliver their report on the Downtown Branch this month.

Angela related two other capital projects. With regards to the Elkridge Branch expansion into the Senior Center portion, she related that this activity will include pavement replacement in order to stabilize the walkway as well as enhanced teen space. We are currently in the schematic design phase with construction slated to begin in 2027 when the senior center moves out. She anticipates that the branch will be open during construction, although we may have to close some sections of the branch.

The storefront replacement of the Glenwood Branch is slated for September 2025 when new doors will be installed to enhance accessibility and improve air flow.

Pat Saunderson presented an overview of the East Columbia Branch revitalization, which will enhance teen space and passport operations. This includes the transfer of the 50+ Center into dedicated teen space after school hours and consolidation of the passport processes in a single location with the reintroduction of a pager system. Plans also call for a Makerspace, the fourth in the library system, and the "Haven", a space repurposed as an enclosed café like space in the center of the branch.

The Board agreed to table discussion of edits to Supplement 4. The document will be sent out as a Google doc with track changes enabled so Board members can input their recommended edits.

The Board approved the slate of FY 26 officers featuring Rob Mentz as Chair, Phillip Dodge as Vice Chair and Antonia Watts as Treasurer.

The Board will be interviewing District 1 and 4 candidates for the Board of Trustees on June 24 and 25.

Liz adjourned the meeting at 7:49 pm to convene in closed session.

Below is a summary of the closed session held on June 4, 2025.

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session:
 - a. Time of closed session: 7:52 pm – 8:44 pm
 - b. Place (location) of closed session: Virtual
 - c. Purpose of the closed session: to discuss collective bargaining
2. Record of the vote of each member as to closing the session:
 - a. Names of members voting aye: Elizabeth Banach, Phillip Dodge, Rob Mentz, Kelly Smith, and Antonia Watts
 - b. Members opposed: none
 - c. Members Abstaining: none
3. Statutory authority to close session: This meeting was closed under the following provisions of General Provisions Art. § 3-305(b)(1) & § 3-305(b) (9) (add others as needed)
4. Listing of each topic actually discussed, persons present, and each action taken in the session:
 - a. Topic description: To discuss personnel matters and collective bargaining
 - b. Persons present for discussion: Tonya Aikens, Dorna Anderson, Elizabeth Banach, Phillip Dodge, Stacey Fields, Christie Lassen, Steve Lewicky, Rob Mentz, Kelly Smith, and Antonia Watts.
 - c. Action Taken/Each Recorded: The board discussed the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for 7 pm on **Wed., September 17, 2025**, at the Savage Branch.

Respectfully submitted,



Tonya Aikens
President & CEO

Good evening board members,

Thank you, once again, for your time and attention. My name is Jocelyn So. I am a part-time customer service specialist at Miller and a member of Howard County Library Workers United, AFSCME.

Having worked for HCLS since April of last year, I've been excited to discover that my affection for library work and commitment to the services we provide has only grown. I love being part of a team that will drop everything to find a kid the latest Dog Man book. I love that my coworkers are all fantastic nerds, each with their own special skill set. I love knowing that customers look to us to help them discover materials, classes, and tools they may not otherwise have access to. I'd like to have a long career at HCLS and know that a fair and balanced contract is an essential part of that. With this sentiment in mind, I've come to speak with you today.

Currently, it is my understanding that the library is walking back from our newly negotiated wage increases. Within a week of signing our agreement, management informed us of their intent to provide only part of the COLA that is noted in Article 18 of the contract, citing a reduced overall budget increase from the County Executive.

Needless to say, I was disappointed and discouraged by the message this sends to me and other library workers who continuously go above and beyond to serve Howard County. In the brief period of time I have worked at HCLS, I have already seen a talented staff member leave for better pay at another library system. I know this story isn't unique. After years of failing to keep up with the rising cost of living, how many more valuable team members will HCLS lose?

Following management's announcement, I've noticed a significant shift in how my coworkers now perceive library leadership. Many have begun to question the trust and respect we previously placed in our administration. At this moment, it is crucial to understand that caring about the people who work for the library is a fundamental part of running our library system.

We are not here to create division. Like many, I was shocked that library leadership silenced us when we attempted to address this matter during Professional Development Day. At that time, I had hoped that we would have the opportunity to raise our concerns and speak openly about the importance of honoring our contract. Instead, almost as soon as I got up to support our speaker, the microphone was confiscated. Actions like this communicate that our leaders would rather silence us than work together for the good of our library system.

It is my hope that today you will hear our respectful message. You have an opportunity to demonstrate the values of accountability and trust by ensuring that funds allocated to the library are being spent in a way that respects our legally binding union contract and reflects the priorities of the community we love to serve. Please follow our already-negotiated union contract and uphold our wage agreement.

Thank you again for your ongoing support for Howard County Library System and its workers.

Hello, my name is Megan Royden and I've worked for HCLS for nearly 18 years. I am an Instructor & Research Specialist at the Miller branch, where I teach customers how to use computers, e-readers and other technology and help with research questions of all varieties. I speak to you today not as an employee but as a union steward and bargaining team member for Howard County Library Workers United.

I'm here today to talk about **our** collective bargaining agreement. We bargained with your representatives for 10 long months to reach an agreement that we felt met the needs of all of us. One of the most important articles in our agreement is Article 18 Wages. This article notes the anticipated wage increases for bargaining unit members for Fiscal Year 26 and 27. It also reads "in the event the wage increases are rejected by Howard County, the employer and the Union will renegotiate the wage increases within the limits of the allocated funding."

Your representative has communicated that you are seeking to re-enter wage negotiations with us because it is your opinion that you received insufficient funding from Howard County to cover our negotiated increases. Through communication from President and CEO Tonya Aikens, it seems that it is your opinion that the only increase that you can afford for us is a 2% COLA and a step. If it were true that you received insufficient funding to operate the library system while funding our negotiated increases, myself and my union siblings would be happy to sit down with your team and figure out a good faith solution that met all of our needs, as we have done in the past.

However, it is difficult for me to believe that truly is the case.

I want to trust what you say to us but your actions have proven otherwise. Weeks after reaching a fully negotiated and signed tentative agreement with your bargaining team, you sent our TAs back to us with several substantive changes in an unprecedented and unprofessional fashion. We have seen no evidence that County Executive Ball rejected our wage increases and in fact have heard the exact opposite from his office. And when our union tried to address this at our recent staff professional development day, our President and CEO shut us down and denied our right to engage in protected concerted activity.

We all understand that budget constraints happen but how you have handled this process will only hurt our library system. Your decisions and communications have been anything but transparent, and instead of working with your staff, it seems you are intent on fighting against us having a strong union. Today, I'm proud to be a union member - I want to be proud that I'm an HCLS employee as well, but how can I when I'm working for people who go back on their word like this? It makes us question your trustworthiness, your reliability and your respect for us as workers. We negotiated in good faith and thought you wanted to make this relationship work collaboratively. But you're demonstrating that you don't trust or value us, your employees.

We urge you to keep your promises, respect our union contract, and move forward on our agreed upon wage increases. Anything less would be a slap in the face to the staff who care so deeply about our library system, our customers, and our community.

Thank you for your time.