



HCLS Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

December 9, 2025 ♦ 7 pm
Elkridge Branch

Board members present were: Rob Mentz, Chair; Phillip Dodge, Vice Chair; Elizabeth Banach; Abby Glassberg; Dawn Popp; and Kelly Smith. Also present were staff members/citizens including, Claire Adams, Mahima Ampani, Lew Belfont, Angela Best, Angela Brade, Mary Brosenne, Kelly Clark, Sarah Cooke, Stacey Fields, Eliana Holgate, Vivek Kapur, Kathleen Klebba, Dan Kenney, Christie Lassen, Marcy Leonard, Steve Lewicky, Diane Li, Tanya Malveaux, Lauren McCloskey, Eben McCullough, Megan Royden, Stephanie Shane, Tiwa Turton, Sheng Wu.

Rob Mentz called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Katie Klebba provided public comment. Her testimony is attached at the end of the minutes.

Dan Kenney and Tiwa Turton of the Accounting Firm Mitchell Titus presented a summary of their 2025 audit of HCLS, which was an unmodified opinion that there were no material weaknesses. They described the audit approach and summarized the audit results, including required communications and other matters.

Stephanie Shane gave an update of the Friends & Foundation of HCLS, on behalf of Friends Chair Nana Owusu. She related that the Friends are well ahead of where they were last year, having amassed \$110K in funding from grants, memberships and other sources. Notably, there was a \$25K Kahlert Foundation grant, and almost \$10K net from the Bauder Adult Battle of the Books. There is a pending grant from the Community Foundation of Howard County worth \$10K for Beyond Words and operations. Upcoming fundraisers include the Branch Raffle running January – February, which includes a grand prize basket of a sunset boat cruise and Baltimore Inner Harbor activities. In addition, Friends are exploring a Books N Brew event at a Howard County brewery in April plus a Tavern Talk in April to celebrate MD250 events.

The Board unanimously approved the Board meeting minutes for September 17.

Marcy Leonard introduced Claire Adams and Mahima Ampani, teen interns, who provided an update on the Teen Design Internship which focuses on the 9K square foot expansion at the Elkridge Branch. They presented the human-centered design concept, ideas for the space, and spoke about the approximately 140 teens serving on committees working on the plan for the Elkridge 50+ Center space that will be vacated when it relocates to the new Elkridge Community Center.

I presented the operating budget up to October 30, 2025, then addressed the wish for a Sole Source Contract with BiblioBoard that advances our ABCD model and helps facilitate the community's ability to co-create with us. Funding would be reallocated from funds currently allocated to the Our Office tool that will be sunsetting in January 2026. The Board approved the Sole Source request.

Angela summarized capital project activities, comprised of the Downtown project, whose feasibility should be complete in March 2026, and the Elkridge Branch expansion whose groundbreaking is expected in Spring 2026. She then discussed maintenance projects addressed by the County from their facilities maintenance budget. These include paver replacement at the Elkridge Branch, the new roof at Glenwood, the replacement doors at GLE that are in shipment, and carpet replacement for Miller, the last of which is slated for FY 2027.

I presented the initial FY 2027 Operating Budget ask, which features a 3% Step and 4% COLA for staff, a 7% increase in medical care costs, and 7.65% increase in FICA in Object 1, along with the potential of \$400K in lost revenue from passports. I explained the situation surrounding the Department of State querying libraries as to their non-profit or governmental affiliation. There is no recommended increase in Object 2, an 8.39% in Object 3 plus a potential for lost passport income of \$400K, a 42.28% increase in Object 4, and no recommended increase in Object 5. The Board approved the proposed FY 2027 operating budget, which will then be submitted to the County Executive where we will work with his team and may have to adjust the budget accordingly.

The Board reviewed edits to Supplement 2 and 3, the latter including the MD Directive memo from the State Librarian regarding dealing with ICE agents in the libraries. The Board approved the edits.

Christie spoke to the wayfinding and signage project which has been completed at the Elkridge Branch, with the rest of the branches minus Central to receive theirs in the next few months.

Angela and I addressed the removal of the capability to check out books on phones, which was a fiscal decision, as well as the potential for an app.

Rob adjourned the meeting at 8:01 pm to convene in closed session.

Below is a summary of the closed session held on December 9, 2025.

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session:
 - a. Time of closed session: 8:06 pm – 9:23 pm
 - b. Place (location) of closed session: Elkridge Branch
 - c. Purpose of the closed session: to discuss personnel matters, collective bargaining and public security
2. Record of the vote of each member as to closing the session:
 - a. Names of members voting aye: Elizabeth Banach, Phillip Dodge, Abby Glassberg, Rob Mentz, Dawn Popp, and Kelly Smith
 - 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) & § 3-305(b) (10) (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, collective bargaining, and public security
 - b. Persons present for discussion: Tonya Aikens, Elizabeth Banach, Angela Brade, Phillip Dodge, Stacey Fields, Abby Glassberg, Christie Lassen, Marcy Leonard, Steve Lewicky, Rob Mentz, Dawn Popp, and Kelly Smith.
 - c. Action Taken/Each Recorded: The board discussed the Collective Bargaining Agreement, along with personnel matters and public security.

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for 7 pm on **Wed., January 21, 2026**, at the East Columbia Branch.

Respectfully submitted,



Tonya Aikens
President & CEO

Good evening to the board and my colleagues. My name is Katie Klebba, and I'm a union member and steward from the Central branch, where I work as the Sunday Supervisor.

Much like the last time I spoke with you in September, we are still awaiting the results of arbitration, and half a year's worth of wage adjustments are being withheld from 200+ bargaining unit members.

Since then, we have been speaking with members of our community—and thousands of those community members have been speaking with you. Board Chair Mentz, I read your statement characterizing our effort as “misinformation” and a “misleading campaign.”

Let me state this plainly: nothing we've shared is fabricated and nothing is misunderstood. What we've shared are the lived realities of library workers struggling under the weight of years of inadequate COLAs and a broken agreement.

But you've already heard this from me. So tonight, I'd like to facilitate a different conversation. I've asked my colleagues to submit brief, anonymous statements about how this administration's decision to break our contract has affected them. For the rest of my time, I will read their statements aloud.

- “I cannot save for my future. My whole paycheck goes to student loans and car loan repayment. My partner and I were hoping to move in together this year, and that's no longer possible because of my financial constraints.”
- “I have been racking up more credit card debt because the same paycheck doesn't go as far as it used to and now I need to use credit to buy necessities.”
- “I have had to postpone urgent vehicle maintenance by months with no clear sign as to when I can prioritize it.”
- “I am now dependent on the Indian Cultural Association for monthly produce donations because I cannot afford enough nutritious food for my children.”
- “I had to pull from my children's college tuition to pay rent.”
- “I struggle to pay my rent every month. I have had to majorly cut back the extracurricular activities I am able to put my children in because money is so tight. I am currently working extra sundays at my branch to try to earn extra money. I have also applied for part time jobs to try to supplement my income.”
- “I have had to scramble to cover urgent car repairs just to keep getting to work, and since I can't afford to live in the county I serve. It's been overwhelming and exhausting to hold everything together.”

- “I am unable to save for the dental surgery I need to not be in constant pain.”
- “I have been struggling with food insecurity, keeping up with bills, and even lost my car because I couldn’t keep up with payments. It’s difficult to get up in the morning. All I can do reliably lately is work. I feel like my life is on pause while I try to get a handle on everything.”

Board members, in 24 hours of collecting responses, I received many more responses than I could read aloud to you in these three minutes, but I’ve submitted a full copy of them with my testimony ahead of this meeting.

From the beginning of this process, we have been telling you there is a fire in this house we share. If you listen closely to the statements shared here, you can feel the heat of it. As you make decisions concerning the budget for the next fiscal year, I would urge you to interrogate the priorities those decisions reflect. If those decisions do not acknowledge that fire and meet it with action, then I fear we may lose the opportunity to repair this house as partners.

Thank you.

Responses collected from Howard County Library System bargaining unit members between 12/1/2025 and 12/2/2025.

Because HCLS has broken our contract and withheld our negotiated wage increase, I...

- cannot save for my future - my whole paycheck goes to student loan and car loan repayment. My partner and I were hoping to move in together this year, and that's no longer possible because of my financial constraints.
- feel that my trust with HCLS has eroded. Why did all HCLS staff members receive a bonus once our contract was finalized but then when it's time for COLA and merit raises, only staff members who aren't part of the bargaining unit received those raises. We are in arbitration for our wages, but why suddenly abandon the "for all" attitude? Why not give COLA/raises to all while still in arbitration?
- Have lost all trust in my employer. My ability to perform my job duties has been affected by my distrust in HCLS to fulfill their duties as my employer. The stress I feel when I am not working has also increased. Seeing that HCLS has no mind to respect contracts with its employees leaves me frightened and considering what other promises will be reneged on.
- feel like all of my hard work has been ignored. I joined HCLS just over a year ago, taking a pay cut to do so because I love the library, and I thought there would be a lot of room for my salary to increase based on the pay range I saw on the job posting. Instead, my pay has not increased at all since I started, and I haven't been able to adjust my budget to keep up with inflation at all.
- Watch my older coworkers push their retirement dates back again and again.
- I have had to postpone urgent vehicle maintenance by months with no clear sign as to when I can prioritize it.
- Because HCLS has broken our contract I am now dependent on the Indian Cultural association for monthly produce donations because I cannot afford enough nutritious food for my children.
- Because HCLS has broken our contract I have had to pull from my children's college tuition to pay rent with no sign when I can start saving for their future education.
- Because HCLS has broken our contract I had to prioritize BGE over a monthly Disney+ subscription.
- Because HCLS has broken our contract I am anxious about going to the Apple store to have my phone repaired because I will not have the money if and when they show me the bill.
- Because HCLS has broken our contract I cannot pay my medical bills on time.
- I had to borrow money/take out an extra loan to replace the heater and boiler in my old house before it got too cold to go without (I have not repaired the AC and heating in my car I needed over the summer and other big cost car repairs yet, hoping it can last a bit longer!), also the general distrust of my employer is a weight felt daily and I know I'm not alone in that feeling, it's such a stab in the back and incredibly stressful and morale crushing, not healthy for our hearts, minds or bodies
- Find contradictory that management keeps encouraging us of taking care of our emotional and financial wellness through our Employee Assistance Newsletter and the AllOne Health webinars, yet the support I need most, fair compensation, is not being provided. The disconnect adds to my stress rather than relieving it. I find it difficult in engaging in my mental wellness when I'm worried if I would be able to pay all my bills every month.
- It has been difficult to trust the leaders of the library and showing up to work has been very disheartening to know that we are not respected as we should be. With a family at home to

provide for, we count on every penny we receive. Knowing that they have broken our contract makes me question whether or not HCLS holds the same values that I thought we shared and has prompted me to look at employment opportunities elsewhere.

- Have been racking up more credit card debt because the same paycheck from FY25 doesn't go as far as it used to and now I need to use credit to buy necessities and cover any kind of emergency spending. I used to have some money to save at the end of the month, but now my goals of a house down payment and a replacement for my 15 year old car are significantly further away.
- Have not been able to plan for my retirement, since I do not want to retire when I have not received my contracted increase. It affects my Social Security payments for the rest of my life.
- Am unable to save for the dental surgery that I need to now be in constant pain.
- am forfeiting most of my paycheck because student loans, monthly bills, health insurance, etc, take up most of my pay. During the time that HCLS was withholding paychecks, I was one of two sole providers for my mother as her health declined. It was impossible to supplement my income with additional work. It made a very difficult time even harder.
- Have been struggling with food insecurity, keeping up with bills, and even lost my car due because I couldn't keep up with payments. My phone, internet, and even the power in my house has been shut off multiple times because I couldn't keep up with the bills. I've been trying to go back to school but worried I won't be able to keep up with it because the anxiety and depression I've been dealing with due to all of my money issues. It's difficult to even get up in the morning. All I can do reliably lately is work. My hobbies and after work activities are suffering because of my stress, and I feel like my life is on pause while I try to get a handle on everything. HCLS constantly talks about how much they value us and see us as family, but I don't feel valued, and I struggle to trust anything said when it's been shown over and over again that we are not being seen or considered in the way HCLS claims they do.
- have to withdraw from my savings every month. Delivering on the promised increase would be, for me, a mere \$90 per paycheck. This may not seem like much to some, but for me, the only incoming in a single income household, that's groceries I'm able to afford.
- Had to pickup more [work] to cover a part of my grocery bills, and to pay for the unexpected damage in my house that needs a lot of repairs. As the library employee for over 2 decades, my life style has not only become more affordable, I'm still working almost 7 days a week to run the cost of living, instead of spending enough time with my family.
- It's disheartening to realize that after all of these yrs, and despite all the promises of the HCLS, I have to keep up my commitment to work hard for the community members and to help them as best as I can, but my workplace decision makers simply ignore and underestimate my loyalty and integrity to the system after all of these yrs.
- have had to borrow money from my sister so that I could pay for an urgent medical expense.
- experienced added stress around transportation. There was a period where I had to jump my car every time I needed to go anywhere with a portable battery in my trunk. This level of mistreatment is tantamount to playing with people's lives. We deserve better. We have earned better.
- I am working extra [] to make ends meet, and even then I would still need (and would if it were possible) to work each and every Sunday to stop on top of things.
- I have had to scramble to cover urgent car repairs just to keep getting to work, and since I can't afford to live in the county I serve, it's been overwhelming and exhausting to hold everything together.
- Because HCLS has broken our contract and withheld our negotiated wage increase, I struggle to pay my rent every month. I have had to majorly cut back the extracurricular activities I am able to put my children in because money is so tight. [] I have also applied for part time jobs to try to

supplement my income. I am very cognizant of the elevated level of stress I live with as a result of all these things that stem from our wages being withheld.

- Feel like my hard work and years of dedication are not valued by HCLS. I just passed the anniversary of my hire date with no reward, no positive feedback, no wage increase.
- Feel like they are out of touch with financial hardships of the branch staff. This is bad for morale.
- have struggled to pay the expenses from when I got divorced this year, and paying my rent and bills on my own since the divorce has been incredibly hard, not to mention stressful. I was counting on the contracted wage increase to help alleviate this difficult financial time, but it wasn't there when I needed it.
- Unable to travel because of not enough money. Unable to renovate some of my house due to not enough money.
- have much lower work morale. My husband has left Federal Government (DOGE early retirement) and not been paid since early October. We both have medical expenses and are trying to make it on my library salary. Chairman Mentz's message is especially disappointing because he doesn't consider that HCLS employees are suffering financially.