



MEMO

To: Montana State Library Commission
From: Jennie Stapp, State Librarian
Subject: Draft Commission Newsletter
Date: December 19, 2025

The following newsletter content was drafted by Perplexity, an artificial intelligence tool approved by the State of Montana, from the transcript of the Commission's December 10, 2025 business meeting. It took approximately five minutes of staff time to prepare.

Staff asked Commissioner Gregg for her input on the content. She recommended that Chair Scribner add a "dear colleague" section to explain the purpose of the newsletter and what readers can expect in the future. Commissioner Gregg also recommended that the newsletter contain links to relevant online content like Administrative Rules of Montana, and that it includes information about upcoming Commission meetings.

If the Commission decides to issue newsletters, staff will use AI to produce and format newsletters for delivery via GovDelivery after each Commission meeting.

State Library Commission December 2025 Newsletter

From the Chair

The State Library Commission wrapped up its December meeting with a strong focus on supporting Montana libraries of all sizes, celebrating staff achievements, and planning for the work ahead in 2026. This newsletter shares a few highlights you may want to pass along to your boards, staff, and community partners.

Welcome to Commissioner Kris Goss

The Commission welcomed a new member, Commissioner Kris Goss, Director of the Helena College Library Learning Hub and the first representative from a two-year college on the Commission. Kris brings experience in K–12 policy, school law, and higher education, along with a strong interest in workforce and economic development and how libraries support those goals in communities across Montana.

Celebrating Staff Longevity: Ashley Gostnell

Commissioners recognized Ashley Gostnell for five years of service as the State Library's accountant. Colleagues praised Ashley's leadership in improving budget processes, making year-end smoother, saving staff time and tax dollars, and bringing a positive, humorous presence to the workplace.

Public Library Open Hours Rule Update

The Commission approved revisions to Administrative Rule 10.102.1159, the "Serving the Community – Open Hours" standard for public libraries. The updated rule maintains a minimum standard for state aid eligibility but gives libraries more flexibility to schedule hours across the year to match local patterns, seasons, and staffing realities, especially in smaller communities.

Commissioners emphasized that:

- The rule sets a minimum, not a cap on hours, and local boards remain free to exceed the minimum as their communities need.
- A large majority of Montana public libraries already operate above the minimum, and the goal is to recognize local control while ensuring that state aid supports active, functioning libraries.

The Commission also discussed the importance of reviewing public library standards more broadly in the coming years to ensure they reflect changing use patterns, including digital access.

Personnel Certification Rule Revised

The Commission adopted revisions to Administrative Rule 10.102.1166, which governs public library personnel certification. The changes clarify requirements, recognize the work of degree-seeking librarians more clearly, and add an expectation that the certification course of study will be reviewed annually at the Commission's final fiscal-year meeting. Current participants can continue under existing requirements until the new standards take effect in July 2026.

Commissioners emphasized that:

- Continuing education credits will not be limited to courses taught by State Library staff; courses from other providers can count toward certification when they are pre-approved and align with the adopted course of study.



- The updated framework tightens expectations around pre-approval and documentation of courses so that director certification and renewal remain rigorous, transparent, and clearly tied to the competencies needed to run Montana public libraries.

Lifelong Learning Highlight: Incarcerated Parents Reading to Their Children

Commissioners heard an update on a new program coordinated by State Library staff that supports incarcerated parents in reading to their children. With grant funding and new video equipment, parents in women's facilities can record themselves reading a book; their children receive both the video and a copy of the book the parent held and personalized. The program is reaching families across Montana and was recently featured in a positive local news story.

Looking Ahead to 2026 Commission Goals

The Commission began shaping its 2026 goals and will take formal action at the February meeting. Among the ideas discussed were:

- Reviewing public library standards and usage trends to better understand how Montanans are using libraries today, including digital services.
- Clarifying and strengthening "serving the public" standards so they are measurable and meaningful.
- Learning more about artificial intelligence and its potential applications for the State Library and for local libraries.
- Expanding outreach so libraries and trustees hear more frequent "good news" from the State Library, such as program highlights and success stories.

There was also interest in encouraging civic and history programming in libraries, such as using pocket constitutions, book lists on Montana and U.S. history, and upcoming state initiatives tied to the 250th anniversary of the United States.

Strengthening Connections with MLA and Local Libraries

Commissioners discussed the importance of a strong, ongoing relationship between the Commission, the State Library, and the Montana Library Association. Ideas included a standing agenda item for MLA reports at Commission meetings and better communication from the



Commission back out to local libraries and boards, possibly through a regular post-meeting newsletter like this one.

If you would like more information about any of these items, including the updated administrative rules or program details, please contact the State Library.