



# MLA to Z

*The Newsletter of the Maine Library Association*

*In this issue*

## **Library Ecosystems**

*page 2*

## **ALA Midwinter wrap-up**

*page 4*

## **Advocacy Bingo**

*page 6*

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## **Are we near the end?**

Nearly one year into the pandemic, vaccines have arrived, and at least right now, it looks like the number of new daily cases in the state is trending downward. What does this mean for our communities, our librarians, and our operations? As many libraries consider reintroducing services that were curtailed, how do they continue to balance safety with meeting the needs of patrons? Is it the right time, or are we being optimistic?

MLA sent a letter to the Maine CDC; read it on page 3. And one librarian shares the positive feelings she has found at work despite the pandemic (page 4).



# Letter from the President

## MLA President Jen Alvino on "library ecosystems"

For the past two years, I have been involved in some interesting work with ALA. Through my membership on the Chapter Relations Committee of ALA, I was appointed to the Statewide Ecosystem Taskforce. The Taskforce was charged with creating a toolkit for state library associations and their partners. The toolkit, now completed and available [here](#), provides resources intended to help build an internal set of relationships among all types of libraries and their professional organizations. As a longtime member of state, regional, and national library organizations, I have learned the importance of the work we do to advocate for our members and the libraries in our state. The ecosystem initiative takes this a step further and provides a framework for ALL library types and association partners to work together, speaking with one voice, to strengthen messaging and advocacy around issues effecting libraries in our state.

*Definition: A library ecosystem is the interconnected network of all types of libraries, library workers, volunteers, and associations that provide and facilitate library services for community members; families; K-20 learners; college and university communities; local, state and federal legislatures and government offices; businesses; nonprofits; and other organizations with specific information needs.*



The work of the taskforce is now complete, but the ecosystem work continues through the ALA Library Ecosystem Subcommittee, of which I am a member. I encourage you to look at the toolkit. I will be working with the MLA Board to use the Ecosystem Continuum and other resources to improve our work with our partners in the state.

# MLA letter to Maine CDC

In January, the Maine Library Association addressed a letter to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention regarding COVID vaccines. Below is the text of the letter that was signed by MLA President Jen Alvino, Vice President Wynter Giddings, Past President Alisia Revitt, and Legislative Chair Sonya Durney.

**Librarians are essential.** We ask you as you move forward in rolling out Phase 1b of the Maine COVID Vaccination Plan that you consider the vital services that Maine libraries provide to their communities. Librarians and library workers in public libraries and academic libraries should be included in Maine Phase 1b distribution plans to protect staff and minimize risk to patrons and users. School librarians are included in plans for the education community and should continue to be prioritized.

Public and academic libraries perform regular and necessary “frontline services” every day. Librarians promote early childhood literacy, provide broadband access, in-person computer and technical assistance, help patrons create resumes and apply for jobs or even start small businesses, provide reliable health information, help patrons complete online government forms, connect college students with textbooks, promote information literacy to create more informed communities, libraries serve as pickup sites for free summer lunch programs. All this in addition to providing books and movies for entertainment. For every dollar spent on Maine public libraries, the ROI for towns is \$4.59 - **librarians are essential to COVID recovery**. This is evidenced by the addition of libraries to the Stafford Act--we provide important social services and information access that aid our country's citizens in recovering from major emergencies and disasters.

Due to working so closely with library patrons, library staff should be considered a high-risk group. Maine vaccination plans should consider both the nature of the work librarians do as well as the clear social and educational benefits that libraries contribute. Including librarians and library workers in the Phase 1b distribution plan will allow our sector to fully reopen public libraries to public service and campus libraries to all students while protecting staff and vulnerable populations. Waiting until Phase 2 to inoculate librarians and library workers will continue to expose Maine librarians on the front lines to unnecessary risk or keep libraries closed, delaying significant benefits to our society.

As background:

- “Librarians” were included among the Essential Workers who should be prioritized for vaccination in the July 2020 CDC AIPC Work Group report “[COVID-19 vaccine prioritization Work Group considerations](#)”
- The December 22, 2020 CDC AIPC [Interim Guidance](#) does not specifically include “librarians” any longer in the definition of essential workers prioritized in either Phase 1b or Phase 1c of vaccine distribution.

We want to ensure that public and academic library workers in communities where libraries plan to re-open to in-person services or have already done so are eligible for vaccination in Phase 1b. The Maine Library Association board is available for further discussion on why libraries are essential and the impact libraries have on Maine communities, [mainelibrary@gmail.com](mailto:mainelibrary@gmail.com)

# ALA Midwinter 2021

Write-up by Kara Reiman

While I would have much preferred to be in Indianapolis checking in with friends from across the country and eating vegan haggis (it's a thing!), ALA Midwinter 2021 virtual conference provided some great soul-nourishing programs. The opening program kicked us off on a fantastic note with a session featuring Dr. Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain who told us about their new book *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019*, which features 80 writers each tackling five-year periods.

*(continued on page 5)*

## Finding Connections During Closure

The pandemic and the closure of our libraries has been really hard. On that, I think we can all agree. It has been especially hard watching my shelves fill up as fewer and fewer items are being taken home on a whim. Curbside pick up is great, but our readers lose the ability to pick up something they didn't even know they wanted. It hasn't been all bad, though.

I know many of the readers in our library better than I did before the pandemic began. Are you surprised to read this? I am surprised I'm writing it, but it's true. Here's how it happened.

Early on, a friend mentioned that she never brought her young kids to the library with a specific book in mind. They simply came to see what we had and took home what looked good. With the onset of curbside pick up, she wondered if she could just ask for a collection of books on a particular subject. Immediately, I knew we were on to something.

Initially, the requests were as simple as "5 picture books about space," but we've gotten much more involved now. Parents send me requests outlining books their kids have enjoyed in the past, and I put together a curated selection of books I think they may like. When a parent tells me their child wants the next book in a series, I often include the first in a different series I think they may like as well. This has also been a great way to introduce some more nonfiction to people who wouldn't otherwise pick it up.

I now have more in depth conversations with our readers about what they and their kids are reading, and more specifically, about what they're enjoying or disliking. With each request, parents tell me what I got right and what missed the mark. It has been really fun to challenge myself, to better learn the body of work available, and to pick out books that kids will enjoy but that they may not have otherwise decided to read.

I know I don't always get it right (because they tell me!), but when a parent tells me their kid really loved one of my suggestions, or when kids start sending me reviews of books they've read, it feels like we're doing something right and still building our community of readers.

*Jessie Trafton, Children's Librarian  
Skidompha Library, Damariscotta*



**(ALA Midwinter, continued from page 4)**

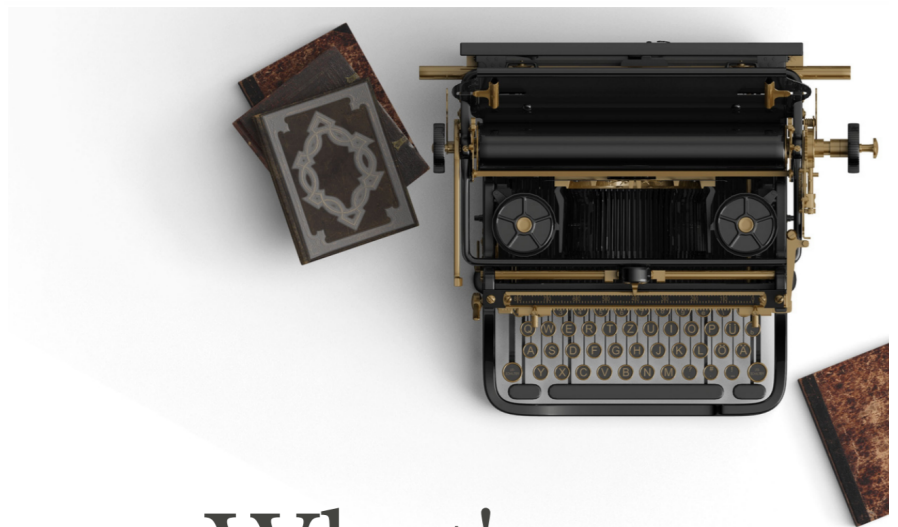
Another phenomenal session was Ruby Bridges who spoke about her experience as the first child to integrate a white school. Getting to that point was only part of her battle. She had to fight angry crowds every morning, and at first she went to school completely alone as parents pulled their children out of class in defiance. Through my own personal education, I've learned that there's a lot about our history I was never taught. I look forward to reading her book *This is Your Time* soon to continue my education.

Emmanuel Acho, a sports analyst, decided this summer after George Floyd's murder that he wanted to do something to help steer the conversations in the right direction. He took inspiration from the questions he was getting from his white friends and started a Youtube series called "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man." The popularity of those led to his upcoming book *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Boy*. Another one on the reading list!

There are many other highlights, some of which include Ziggy Marley singing to us, Jill Biden sharing her love of libraries and books, and a Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Observance and Sunrise Celebration that focused on King's "other America" and its relevance to today.

Aside from the excellent programming, I go there to represent you on the ALA Council.

During three sessions, we passed several resolutions. I'll highlight a few here, but full council minutes can be found [here](#). We got a final report from the latest working group discussing possible changes to the association. The next working group will be bringing some specific recommendations over the next year. Council will vote on those. Our Executive Director, Tracie Hall, presented her five-year pivot strategy, which includes a power house advisory group. A resolution denouncing the use of behavioral surveillance data in libraries passed. A resolution asking ALA to work with the CDC and other agencies to help re-classify library staff as level 1B in the vaccination status.



## What's on your mind?

Your library colleagues want to know!  
Send your submissions (photos, full-length articles, or short shoutouts) to

**MLAtoZeditor@gmail.com**





## From Legislative Advocacy

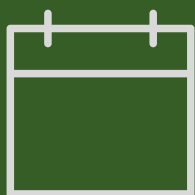
Sonya Durney

# Library Advocacy Bingo

Friends, I hope you will consider joining us to play Library Advocacy Bingo this spring. In years past we have gathered at the Maine State Capital for an exciting day of networking with legislators and their staff - sharing with anyone who will listen how awesome Maine libraries are! Unfortunately, we are unable to gather in person this year. Still, it is so important for us to keep telling our library stories!

MLA is pleased to be partnering with the Maine State Library and the Maine Association of School Libraries to present Maine Library Advocacy Bingo. Over the course of eight weeks, we will engage in a variety of advocacy activities. There will be plenty of opportunities to learn and network including two in-depth Advocacy Academy Workshops led by Megan Cusick the Assistant Director for State Advocacy in ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy and a session with Greg Kesich and Sarah Collins from the Portland Press Herald on how to write an effective letter to the editor. Bingo cards with the full list of activities will be sent out to those who register on February 17th.

We all know how important libraries will be as communities recover from the pandemic. It is more important than ever that we make sure legislators and other stakeholders are also aware of the vital role we play in our communities.



## ON THE CALENDAR

**Feb. 17 - Apr. 10** Library Advocacy Bingo

**March 3** Maine Library Legislative Day Presents: ALA Advocacy Academy Part I

**March 10** Maine Library Legislative Day Presents: ALA Advocacy Academy Part II

**March TBA** Take a coffee break and chat with your fellow MLA members

**May 24-25** MLA Annual Conference (virtual)