

Legislative Day Overview

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By Judi Paradis, Legislative Committee Chairperson

Librarians were everywhere at the State House on April 2 as members of MSLA and MLA held their first joint State Legislative Day. Large crowds attract legislators (so we learned!)The librarians gathered in the Great Hall of Flags and were joined at their events throughout the day by a constant stream of representatives, senators, and legislative aides—making it easy to talk to lots of them about the needs of school libraries.

There were many high points to the day. MSLA hosted its annual awards ceremony for our bookmark contest. MSLA and MLA members worked together at morning sessions providing briefings for librarians and library supporters who planned to lobby their legislators. Members of both organizations convened in the Great Hall for a luncheon that featured a program called "Telling Our Stories." Students, administrators, and public library patrons shared compelling stories about the strong and positive impact of school and public libraries across Massachusetts. Following this program, awards were given to strong advocates of libraries. MSLA awarded its Legislator of the Year Award to Representative Robert Rice of Gardner. Representative Rice is a former school librarian and currently serves on the House Education Committee, where he is a strong voice for our legislative initiatives. We also presented Representative Frank Smizik of Brookline with our Joan Gallagher Legislator Award. Representative Smizik is the sponsor of our bill and has provided much support and guidance to MSLA in its legislative work.

A high point of the luncheon was the announcement of the formation of a Library Legislative Caucus. Representative Mark Falzone is forming this caucus of members of the House and Senate to promote library initiatives. MSLA is eager to have this caucus focus on both school and public library matters. (Please ask your state legislators to join this caucus!)

MSLA members also went out into the State House to call on members of the Joint Committee on Education to ask for support of our bill H564. At present, this bill, and all bills related to Chapter 70, which regulates spending on education, have been tabled. Our members made the case for reviving our bill. Bill H564 does not ask for specific funding for school libraries, but simply adds school libraries to the list of items that cities and towns can fund with Chapter 70 money. We were well received by many legislators. Our lobbyist, Chris Gregory, is now going to work on getting members of the legislature to sign on to a letter demanding that the Education Committee vote on our bill. Watch for information on our list-serve asking members to help with this effort!