

Angela Goodrich

Angela Goodrich Chief Operating Officer, Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) strongly supports the **Library E-Book Pricing Fairness Amendment Act of 2025** and urges the Council of the District of Columbia to advance this legislation. The challenges this bill addresses are not isolated or local in nature—they represent a **national crisis for public libraries** and the communities they serve.

ULC represents public library systems serving major cities across the United States and Canada, including the District of Columbia Public Library. Collectively, ULC members serve approximately **30 percent of the U.S. population** and play a critical role in advancing literacy, education, workforce development, and digital equity.

A National E-Book Pricing Crisis

Public libraries across the country are experiencing an **e-book pricing and licensing crisis** driven by unsustainable market practices:

- A typical e-book license costs libraries **approximately \$55 for a two-year, single-user license**, compared to an average **consumer e-book price of \$13** and **\$27 for a physical book**.
- Many urban libraries now spend **50 percent or more of their collections budgets on licensed digital content**, diverting public funds from other essential materials and services.
- Unlike print books, most digital content is **licensed rather than owned**, meaning access is time-limited, use-restricted, or subject to removal without warning.
- Digital circulation continues to rise sharply, with **digital book borrowing increasing more than 34 percent since 2019**, placing additional strain on already constrained library budgets.
- A small number of major publishers control the majority of high-demand titles, leaving libraries with **little negotiating power** despite being publicly funded institutions.

These conditions are unsustainable and undermine libraries' ability to serve residents equitably.

ULC's **Statement on Equitable Access to E-Books** affirms that public libraries are essential public infrastructure in a digital society. When libraries cannot afford or maintain digital collections, the harm falls disproportionately on **low-income residents, seniors, people with disabilities, students, and job seekers** who rely on digital access.

Libraries support authors, expand readership, and invest millions of dollars annually in published works. This legislation does not regulate copyright or set prices; rather, it promotes **fair, transparent, and reasonable access** to digital materials for publicly funded institutions.

The District has a strong interest in ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly and that residents have equitable access to knowledge and opportunity. The Library E-Book Pricing Fairness Amendment Act of 2025 aligns with DC's commitments to **consumer protection, digital equity, and educational access** and reflects responsible public stewardship.

This issue remains universal and critical to ensure our public libraries can provide digital resources to all people without significant barriers to access including unreasonable wait times, metered access for popular titles and an overall reduction in the quantity of materials available as more and more public funds are spent on fewer e-books. This issue has grown in importance since 2020 and will only become more important to

ensure and sustain modern libraries.

ULC appreciates the Council's leadership and urges passage of this legislation to help address a **national market failure** that is harming libraries and the communities they serve.