

# LIBRARY E-BOOK PRICING FAIRNESS AMENDMENT ACT OF 2025

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025  
1 P.M.

Committee on Human Services

## TESTIMONY

District of Columbia Public Library  
Richard Reyes-Gavilan, Executive Director

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Good afternoon Councilmember Frumin, members of the Committee on Human Services, and staff. I am Richard Reyes-Gavilan, Executive Director of DC Public Library and I am pleased to deliver testimony in support of B26-0490 the *Library E-Book Pricing Fairness Amendment Act of 2025*.

I am here today not only on behalf of our library system, but also on behalf of the thousands of District residents who rely on equitable access to digital content—access that is increasingly threatened by unfair and unsustainable e-book licensing practices.

This proposed legislation represents a thoughtful and strategic approach to a national problem. By conditioning DCPL's participation on the passage of similar legislation in at least ten other states representing at least 50 million residents, the bill recognizes the power of collective action. It sends a clear message to publishers: libraries are not passive consumers, but essential public institutions that deserve fair treatment in the digital marketplace.

Currently, libraries are often forced to pay exorbitant prices for e-books—often several times more than what consumers pay—and are subject to restrictive licensing terms that limit how and for how long we can lend digital materials.

These practices not only strain our budgets but also undermine our mission to provide free and open access to information for all.

In FY19 DC Public Library spent \$655,500 on ebooks. That amount represented 11% of our overall collections budget. DCPL circulated 1.58 million digital items that year. In FY25 the Library spent \$1.62 million on ebooks, almost three times as much as in 2019. That amount represented 34% of our overall collections budget. DCPL circulated 3.74 million digital items in FY25. Somehow, the wait time for ebooks was still longer in FY25 (46 days) than it was in FY19 (45 days), demonstrating how popular ebooks have become, especially as a result of the reading disruption that occurred during the pandemic, and also demonstrating that DCPL simply cannot meet the demand for electronic books.

During that seven-year span, the Library's collections budget has pretty much remained constant, save for a few years with infusions of one-time funding for opening day collections for new libraries. You can imagine, because of flat budgets, ebook pricing and licensing restrictions, and a continued demand for print books, especially for children, that our approach to buying books will have to change.

Choosing between buying ebooks and print books is a losing proposition for libraries but one that we are increasingly being forced to make. There are a host of reasons different readers prefer one format over another and it's not our goal to pick favorites. As our collections dollars stagnate or decrease and the cost of ebooks increases when compared to print books, we will need to begin prioritizing print books because they're cheaper, they last longer, there are no artificial limits on the number that can be purchased, and they can incentivize physical visits to our libraries that offer so many other services in addition to books. We will need to be comfortable with the fact that for adults especially, the convenience of ebooks – available instantly, 24 hours a day,

seven days a week – will be disregarded because of dwindling collections budgets and increased ebook acquisition costs. Typically, libraries like to make it easier for residents to access books. We are approaching a scenario in which we will make a conscious effort to make it more difficult.

The District has long been a leader in digital equity. From our robust and well-used wifi signals to our investments in digital literacy, we have worked to ensure that every resident—regardless of income, age, or ability—can participate fully in the digital world. But our efforts are hampered when publishers impose restrictive barriers to access.

Librarians understand that authors and publishers need to earn a living and that unlimited and unrestricted access to ebooks in perpetuity is not a model that is sustainable for them. Without some friction, there would be little incentive for anyone to ever actually buy an e-book and that is what the big publishers have long argued. With that said, the current model imposed on libraries seems almost arbitrary if not punitive and disregards the important role libraries play in fostering a love of reading and in the promotion and marketing of authors and books, all of which we do at no cost to publishers. We would like for there to be good faith negotiation that continues to turn a profit for publishers and authors but also allows libraries to get more value for the amount we are spending each year on electronic content.

We appreciate the Committee's measured and forward-thinking approach to this legislation and thank the Committee for consulting DCPL as the legislation was being crafted. In closing, I would also like to caution the precedent this sets in legislating purchasing decisions of an independent public library. If we get to the point where the 10 state / 50 million residents threshold is reached, I would like to continue working with the Committee on possible amendments to the legislation to ensure we are not depriving District residents of reading materials.

Thank you for inviting me to testify. I am joined this afternoon by Lunden  
Gillespie, DC Public Library's Director of Collections and we are happy to  
answer any questions you may have.