

**Testimony in support of
HB518 – Public Libraries – Electronic Book Licenses - Access
House Ways and Means Committee
Friday, February 5, 2021**

Honorable Committee Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington and Distinguished Delegates:

On behalf of the Maryland Library Association and its members, which represent public, academic, school, and government libraries throughout the state, we ask your support for the passage of HB518, Public Libraries-Electronic Book Licenses- Access. This bill will finally address a longstanding issue in the delivery of public library services throughout the state by requiring publishers to sell digital book licenses at fair and reasonable rates.

Since the advent of the eBook, public libraries have been subjected to predatory pricing and lending structures by publishers. This situation does not reflect publishers' consumer pricing model, nor the purchasing model for print books, where public libraries are simply charged the same consumer price for the book in order to make it accessible to the community. Purchasing an eBook license is another matter entirely. Publishers subject public libraries to pricing as much as three times the cost to consumers, delay or limit the availability of certain titles, and block access to some titles altogether. As an example, Amazon Audible publishing refuses to sell J.K. Rowling titles (author of the *Harry Potter* series) to public libraries for public circulation. These extremely biased practices place significant added cost burden on our county library systems, and worse, possibly, prevent all citizens from gaining equal access to literature and information in their communities. We firmly hold that no Marylander should be required to use a credit card in order to read a book.

The American Library Association and the Maryland Library community have attempted to negotiate fair terms and practices with publishers for more than a decade, with little success. On the advice of the Maryland Attorney General's office, we are instead pursuing this bold piece of legislation that reflects pioneering bills in New York and Rhode Island. While public libraries are named in the bill, academic and university libraries, K-12 school libraries, and all others who make digital content accessible to Marylanders will benefit from improved business terms and practices, allowing us all to direct precious taxpayer resources to where it is needed most in the state, and not in publishers' pockets.

Thank you for your support of this HB518, Maryland's Public Libraries, and Marylanders right to read widely and freely.

Sincerely,

Morgan Miller
Executive Director, Cecil County Public Library
President- Maryland Library Association