

March 4, 2026

The Honorable Hanna M. Gallo, Chair
Senate Education Committee
Rhode Island House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: SENATE BILL 2525 – AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- LIBRARY EBOOK CONTRACTS

Chair Gallo and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, we respectfully submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 2525.

Public libraries are fundamental municipal institutions that advance literacy, education, workforce development, and equitable access to information in every community across Rhode Island. As technology evolves, libraries must continue fulfilling their longstanding mission in digital spaces. Unfortunately, current eBook licensing practices have created serious financial and operational barriers that undermine that mission.

Unlike print books, which libraries purchase outright and lend pursuant to well-established principles, eBooks are licensed rather than owned. This distinction allows publishers and aggregators to impose restrictive and costly terms on libraries, or to withhold access entirely. In many cases:

- eBooks cost libraries three to ten times the consumer price for the same title.
- Licenses commonly expire after 24 months or after 26 checkouts.
- Certain titles are not made available to libraries at any price.

These practices erode libraries' ability to provide consistent, nondiscriminatory access to materials and compromise long-term preservation. Municipal libraries, which operate with limited local budgets, have little bargaining power and are rarely able to negotiate more equitable terms. The result is increased costs for taxpayers or diminished access for residents, particularly students, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those without reliable transportation or broadband alternatives.

Senate Bill 2525 provides a measured and legally grounded response. By anchoring the legislation in Rhode Island's consumer protection framework, specifically the Rhode Island Unfair Sales Practices Act (R.I. General Laws § 6-13) the bill affirms the State's authority to regulate unfair and unconscionable contractual practices that undermine public policy.

The legislation seeks to ensure:

- Contractual agreements between libraries and publishers contain equitable licensing terms.
- Digital literary materials maintain at least the same practical utility as their analog counterparts.
- No contract requires or enables a library to violate state laws protecting the confidentiality of patron records.
- Courts retain authority to deem unconscionable or deceptive provisions unenforceable.

This approach does not interfere with federal copyright protections. Rather, it harnesses traditional state powers over contracts and consumer protection to safeguard public institutions and the residents they serve. It provides clarity, promotes fairness, and strengthens the ability of municipal libraries to continue offering open access to knowledge in the digital age.

Libraries are indispensable to Rhode Island's educational attainment, economic vitality, and civic life. Ensuring sustainable and equitable access to eBooks is not simply a procurement issue, it is a matter of public policy and community well-being.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge favorable consideration of Senate Bill 2525, as we believe it will deliver meaningful and lasting benefits to families and individuals across Rhode Island.

We appreciate the Committee's thoughtful review and thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective.

Sincerely,



Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of Senate Education Committee