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rilibraries.org

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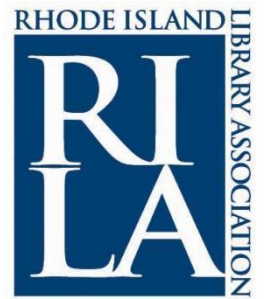
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March 3, 2026



Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Library Association (RILA). I urge your support for legislation that protects fair access to electronic literary materials for libraries and the communities they serve. S2525 establishes essential consumer protections, ensures equitable licensing terms for ebooks and digital audiobooks, and safeguards the public's constitutional right to library services.

S2525 requires that "any contract between a publisher or aggregator and a library for electronic literary materials be governed by Rhode Island law, specifically consumer protection law, and uses the power of the state government to regulate the terms of library ebook contracts and to protect public policy." (EBook Study Group written testimony, House Corporations, 2/27/24)

Under this legislation, publishers who make ebooks or digital audiobooks available to consumers in Rhode Island must also make them available to Rhode Island libraries at the same time. Publishers would be prohibited from charging libraries more than the price offered to the general public for the same title. The bill also includes standard severability language to ensure that, if any provision is found invalid, the remaining provisions remain in effect.

Most importantly, this bill includes a "trigger clause"; that the provisions of this law will not go into effect until the Rhode Island Attorney General determines and publishes notice that at least two other states have enacted laws that are substantially similar in purpose to this bill, and that those states collectively represent a combined population of at least ten million (10,000,000) persons, as determined by the most recent United States decennial census.

Libraries across Rhode Island face unsustainable pricing practices from major publishers. Many publishers charge libraries up to nine times—or more—the consumer price for the same ebook or digital audiobook. These purchases are not permanent; they are temporary licenses that expire after a set period or number of checkouts, forcing libraries to decide if they can afford to repurchase the same title at inflated prices.

In 2025 alone, Rhode Island's public libraries spent more than \$755,000 on ebook and audiobook licenses to meet patron demand. Nearly 12,900 titles currently have active waitlists. At an average cost of \$73 per ebook and \$85 per audiobook, purchasing just one copy of each in-demand title would cost over \$1 million. This is simply not sustainable for libraries operating under limited budgets.

Some publishers have refused to sell certain ebooks to libraries altogether. For example, *Charlotte's Web* is unavailable to libraries in ebook format, yet it is sold to consumers on Amazon for \$8.99.

These practices undermine the foundational purpose of copyright law: to promote the dissemination of knowledge. Libraries—institutions that predate the Copyright Act—have always been essential to preserving and circulating books for the public good, and they play a vital role in our democracy to have an informed citizenry. In a state where our citizens use and love their libraries, and love to read, this creates a problem: with our limited library budgets we cannot purchase enough ebook licenses to meet the demand of our library users. They rely on the library for reading material that they do not have the disposable income to obtain themselves.

Restricting access to ebooks disproportionately harms people with disabilities. Ebooks and digital audiobooks help Rhode Island citizens with visual, motor, or learning impairments enjoy books they could not otherwise. According to the CDC, approximately 1 in 4 Americans has a physical or cognitive disability. Limiting access to accessible reading formats directly undermines equity and inclusion.

With this bill, Rhode Island libraries want fair and reasonable pricing and terms for ebooks and digital audiobooks, just like we have with physical media. We want to promote authors and their works, promote reading and listening, provide access to information and learning, and enable our users to be a part of the current cultural conversations surrounding literature, news, and information. This is a fundamental right for all Rhode Island citizens.

Our state constitution affirms this right. Article XII states: "The diffusion of knowledge... being essential to the preservation of their rights and liberties, it shall be the duty of the general assembly to promote...public libraries, and to adopt all means which it may deem necessary and proper to secure to the people the advantages and opportunities of education and public library services."

Our neighboring state, Connecticut, enacted similar legislation in 2025. Rhode Island now has the opportunity to join this growing effort to protect libraries, ensure equitable access to information, and safeguard taxpayer dollars.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill and help ensure that Rhode Island's libraries can continue to fulfill their mission of providing free and equitable access to knowledge for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Hanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Benjamin Hanley, MLIS

RILA President