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North American Elected Officials Send Message to E-Book Publishers: Price Gouging Public Libraries Is Unacceptable

Mayors and county executives from major urban jurisdictions sign statement urging e-book publishers to institute equitable and transparent pricing for public libraries.

WASHINGTON – Seventy-seven elected officials from North American cities and counties have signed the Urban Libraries Council’s Statement on Equitable Public Access to E-Books, championing the urgent need for equitable e-book pricing and access for public libraries. The statement has been signed by mayors and county executives from some of the largest urban jurisdictions in North America – together, these leaders serve over 44 million citizens.

The statement has been issued in direct response to Macmillan Publisher’s embargo on e-book sales to libraries that went into effect on November 1. With this new policy, libraries cannot purchase more than a single copy of new e-book titles from Macmillan for the first two months after the book’s initial publication. The Macmillan embargo will prevent libraries from providing equitable access to digital learning opportunities, widening the digital divide and creating even greater obstacles for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

“Multinational publishers are price-gouging taxpayers and intensifying the gaps between the haves and have-nots in communities of all sizes with their restrictive licenses and excessively high prices. Most concerning is the new e-book embargo imposed by Macmillan Publishers, which results in an intentional erosion of digital equity by severely restricting e-book access for library patrons,” said ULC President & CEO Susan Benton. “By signing the Statement on Equitable Public Access to E-Books, North America’s mayors and county executives are sending a powerful message they will not stand for the extreme restrictions e-book publishers are placing on public libraries, which limit/jeopardize their essential role as engines for democracy.”

Developed by ULC in partnership with the Canadian Urban Libraries Council, the statement serves as a platform for city and county leaders to show their support for the vital role that libraries play in building

educated communities, and to add their voices to the call for e-book publishers to eliminate discriminatory lending models for libraries. The statement reads as follows:

Major publishers have introduced severe restrictions to e-book and e-audiobook lending for public libraries, including embargoes on the sales of new titles and unreasonably high prices, which far exceed the prices offered for print books. As a result, libraries will be unable to fulfill their core functions in building educated, literate communities. These restrictions will be most harmful for populations who already face significant barriers to equitable knowledge and information access in our communities – including youth, people living with disabilities and those with limited financial means.

Public libraries play an essential role in leveling the playing field and strengthening the foundation of our communities. As digital technologies become increasingly inseparable from the ways that people learn, work and interact, the library’s unique ability to create onramps for information and knowledge access is more important than ever. There is significant, rising demand for e-books and e-audiobooks from public library users – overall, digital content circulation is increasing by 30% per year.

As elected public officials and trusted leaders in our communities, we are committed to protecting and supporting the capacity of public libraries to:

- Provide equal access for individuals to gain knowledge and become proficient with digital tools, regardless of their income, physical abilities, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, citizenship status or religion.
- Support lifelong learning and foster empathy, curiosity, civic engagement and a love of reading among community members.
- Educate community members about the rights, responsibilities and implications of their lives online, including data privacy risks when accessing online learning resources and digital content.
- Serve as valued partners to local government in advancing city/county outcomes for digital inclusion and as institutions that support informed citizens.

Our cities and counties are strongest when all individuals have the same opportunities to further their personal, educational and professional goals. Our democracy is non-negotiable. We stand with all who are urging e-book and e-audiobook publishers to institute fair, transparent and flexible lending models for public libraries.

The following mayors and county executives have signed on to the above statement:

IN THE UNITED STATES

County Board of Supervisors VP Keith Carson
Alameda County, Calif.

Mayor Ethan Berkowitz
Anchorage, Alaska

County Executive Steuart Pittman
Anne Arundel County, Md.

Mayor Steve Adler
Austin, Texas

Mayor Bernard Young
Baltimore, Md.

County Judge Nelson Wolff
Bexar County, Texas

Mayor Thomas Bernabei
Canton, Ohio

Mayor Lori Lightfoot
Chicago, Ill.

County Board of Supervisors Chair John Gioia
Contra Costa County, Calif.

Mayor Steve Schewel
Durham, N.C.

County Executive Bryan Hill
Fairfax County, Va.

City Manager David Parish
Greensboro, N.C.

Mayor Luke A. Bronin
Hartford, Conn.

County Executive Calvin B. Ball III
Howard County, Md.

County Executive Frank White
Jackson County, Mo.

County Commissioner Tina Skeldon Wozniak
Lucas County, Ohio

County Commissioner Anthony Traficanti
Mahoning County, Ohio

County Executive Marc Elrich
Montgomery County, Md.

County Chair Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County, Ore.

Mayor Toni Harp
New Haven, Conn.

County Executive John A. Olszewski Jr.
Baltimore County, Md.

Mayor Marc McGovern
Cambridge, Mass.

Mayor Vi Lyles
Charlotte, N.C.

Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin
Columbia, S.C.

City Manager T.C. Broadnax
Dallas, Texas

County Manager Wendell Davis
Durham County, N.C.

Mayor Nancy B. Vaughan
Greensboro, N.C.

County Commissioner Denise Driehaus
Hamilton County, Ohio

Mayor Sylvester Turner
Houston, Texas

Mayor Eileen Weir
Independence, Mo.

Mayor Eric Garcetti
Los Angeles, Calif.

Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway
Madison, Wis.

County Manager Dena Diorio
Mecklenburg County, N.C.

County Council President Nancy Navarro
Montgomery County, Md.

Mayor John Cooper
Nashville, Tenn.

Mayor LaToya Cantrell
New Orleans, La.

Mayor Breea Clark
Norman, Okla.

Mayor Bill Peduto
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Mayor Lovely Warren
Rochester, N.Y.

Mayor Jenny Wilson
Salt Lake County, Utah

Mayor London N. Breed
San Francisco, Calif.

Mayor Gleam Davis
Santa Monica, Calif.

County Executive Sam Page
St. Louis County, Mo.

Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz
Toledo, Ohio

Mayor Jamael Tito Brown
Youngstown, Ohio

Mayor Jim Kenney
Philadelphia, Pa.

County Council Chair Paul Livingston
Richland County, S.C.

Mayor Melvin Carter
Saint Paul, Minn.

Mayor Ron Nirenberg
San Antonio, Texas

Mayor Sam Liccardo
San José, Calif.

Mayor George Van Dusen
Skokie, Ill.

County Commissioner Richard Regula
Stark County, Ohio

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Washington, D.C.

IN CANADA

Mayor Jeff Lehman
Barrie, Ont.

District Board Chair Rhona Martin
Columbia Shuswap Regional District, B.C.

Mayor Don Iveson
Edmonton, Alta.

Mayor Cam Guthrie
Guelph, Ont.

Mayor Gordon Krantz
Milton, Ont.

Mayor Rob Burton
Oakville, Ont.

Mayor Andy Adams
Campbell River, B.C.

Mayor Michelle Staples
Duncan, B.C.

Mayor Ron Oszust
Golden, B.C.

Mayor Fred Eisenberger
Hamilton, Ont.

Mayor Leonard Krog
Nanaimo, B.C.

Mayor Dan Carter
Oshawa, Ont.

Mayor Jim Watson
Ottawa, Ont.

Mayor Dennis Dugas
Port Hardy, B.C.

Mayor Gabriele Wickstrom
Port McNeill, B.C.

Mayor Kris Olsen
Queen Charlotte, B.C.

District Board Chair Karla Kozakevich
Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, B.C.

Mayor John MacDonald
Sayward, B.C.

Mayor Cliff McNeil-Smith
Sidney, B.C.

Mayor Maja Tait
Sooke, B.C.

Mayor Walter Sendzik
St. Catharines, Ont.

Mayor Doug McCallum
Surrey, B.C.

Mayor John Tory
Toronto, Ont.

Mayor Gord Milsom
West Kelowna, B.C.

Visit urbanlibraries.org for more information about the statement and the most up-to-date list of signatories.

About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st-century. More than 150 urban member libraries in the U.S. and Canada rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today's communities and provide new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital inclusion, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity.

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