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CULC/CBUC Press Contact

Jefferson Gilbert, Executive Director
416-699-1938
jgilbert@culc.ca

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

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

TORONTO and WASHINGTON – Seventy-nine elected officials from North American cities and counties have signed the joint Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada and 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 CULC/CBUC Chair Pilar Martinez and 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 CULC/CBUC in partnership with ULC, 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 (USA) have signed on to the above statement:

IN CANADA

Mayor Jeff Lehman
Barrie, Ont.

Mayor Andy Adams
Campbell River, B.C.

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

Mayor Michelle Staples
Duncan, B.C.

Mayor Don Iveson
Edmonton, Alta.

Mayor Ron Oszust
Golden, B.C.

Mayor Cam Guthrie
Guelph, Ont.

Mayor Fred Eisenberger
Hamilton, Ont.

Mayor Gordon Krantz
Milton, Ont.

Mayor Leonard Krog
Nanaimo, B.C.

Mayor Rob Burton
Oakville, Ont.

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.

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.

IN THE UNITED STATES

County Board of Supervisors Vice-President
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 Executive John A. Olszewski Jr.
Baltimore County, Md.

County Judge Nelson Wolff
Bexar County, Texas

Mayor Marc McGovern
Cambridge, Mass.

Mayor Thomas Bernabei
Canton, Ohio

Mayor Vi Lyles
Charlotte, N.C.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot
Chicago, Ill.

Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin
Columbia, S.C.

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

City Manager T.C. Broadnax
Dallas, Texas

Mayor Steve Schewel
Durham, N.C.

County Executive Bryan Hill
Fairfax County, Va.

Mayor Nancy B. Vaughan
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.

Mayor Breea Clark
Norman, Okla.

Mayor Bill Peduto
Pittsburgh, Penn.

Mayor Lovely Warren
Rochester, N.Y.

Mayor Jenny Wilson
Salt Lake County, Utah

Mayor London N. Breed
San Francisco, Calif.

County Manager Wendell Davis
Durham County, N.C.

City Manager David Parish
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 Jim Kenney
Philadelphia, Penn.

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 Gleam Davis
Santa Monica, Calif.

Mayor George Van Dusen
Skokie, Ill.

County Executive Sam Page
St. Louis County, Mo.

County Commissioner Richard Regula
Stark County, Ohio

Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz
Toledo, Ohio

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Washington, D.C.

Mayor Jamael Tito Brown
Youngstown, Ohio

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

About the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada

The mission of the Canadian Urban Library Council/ Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) is to work collaboratively to build vibrant urban communities by strengthening the capacity of Canada's urban libraries. For more than 25 years CULC/CBUC has worked to ensure better library service within this nation's populated urban areas. To achieve the mission the organization is dedicated to the following: Research; Capacity Building; and Knowledge Transfer.

The members attend to the needs of over 7.5 million active users who on an annual basis make more than 384 million uses of our near 700 locations and virtual services. The membership employs more than 12,000 library workers, more than 70% of all Canadians are served by a CULC/CBUC member library and the associated activity comprises more than 80% of Canada's public library activity. The mandate is ambitious and the reach significant.

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.