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ALA launches national campaign against e-book embargo

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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE – Today the American Library Association (ALA) and Public Library Association (PLA) announced a public campaign in response to recent efforts to limit library access to e-books. In a press conference held at the Nashville Public Library during the 2019 Digital Book World conference, ALA debuted an online petition at eBooksForAll.org (<http://www.ebooksforall.org>) for members of the public to urge Macmillan Publishers CEO John Sargent to reverse the proposed embargo on e-books sold to libraries. (See full petition text below.)

“ALA’s goal is to send a clear message to Macmillan’s CEO John Sargent: e-book access should be neither denied nor delayed,” said ALA Executive Director Mary Ghikas. “Our members are telling us their patrons want an easy way to join this movement and demand e-book access for all. We heard them, and today’s launch is the beginning of a public advocacy campaign in support of that. Libraries have millions of allies out there, and we’re inviting them to take action.”

ALA has denounced Macmillan’s embargo and mobilized opposition to it using the social media hashtag #eBooksForAll since the publisher announced the embargo in July. Under Macmillan’s new pricing model, a library may purchase one copy upon release of a new title in e-book format, after which the publisher will impose an eight-week embargo on additional copies of that title sold to the library. The additional copies will then be available for two years of access.

“Macmillan’s policy compromises timely access to popular books and portrays library patrons and libraries themselves as the villains. The policy must be reversed,” said PLA President and San Antonio Library Director Ramiro Salazar, who unveiled the online petition. “We are asking all of our library patrons and readers everywhere to stand up for libraries’ ability to buy and lend the digital content they expect to find at our libraries.”

Kent Oliver, director of the 21-branch Nashville Public Library, which hosted the press conference, said his library would take a hard hit from the embargo.

"E-books and other digital content are extremely popular in Nashville. Checkouts for e-books increased by 22% last year alone, while e-audiobook checkouts increased by 33%," Oliver said. "Additionally, we purchase enough books that patrons do not wait more than 3.5 months, at the most, to read the most in-demand titles. An embargo that limits us to a single copy could very well result in our patrons waiting a year or longer to check out their favorite books."

Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library CEO Patrick Losinski, who was in Nashville for the Digital Book World conference, remarked on the role of libraries as part of the "reading ecosystem, stating that "now is not the time to drive a wedge between the proven partnership for success that authors, publishers and public libraries have enjoyed. We believe our investment in purchasing e-books for our collection – even at much higher prices than the average consumer – supports everyone. Libraries are not competitors, we're collaborators."

In contrast with Macmillan's move to restrict access to e-books, ALA announced plans to bring unrestricted e-book access to everyone. In an innovative partnership with e-book distributor Rakuten OverDrive, the "Libraries Transform Book Pick" will allow everyone who uses his or her library card to borrow e-books to read the same title at the same time. From October 7-21, 2019, the debut novel "After the Flood" will be available for unlimited e-book checkouts at public libraries using Rakuten OverDrive. Readers will only need a library card to download a free copy of the e-book to their device. There will be no wait lists or holds for the title.

"The Libraries Transform Book Pick is good news for readers and authors," said Ghikas. "While Macmillan's embargo hurts libraries, this partnership will help them."

Full text of petition as found on eBooksForAll.org

America's libraries are committed to promoting literacy and a love of reading with diverse collections, programs and services for all ages. In an increasingly digital world, our libraries are investing more in e-books and downloadable media. And millions of people discover and explore new and favorite authors through both our digital and print collections.

But now one publisher has decided to limit readers' access to new e-book titles through their libraries.

Beginning November 1, 2019, Macmillan Publishers will allow libraries to purchase only one copy of each new e-book title for the first eight weeks after a book's release.

This embargo would limit libraries' ability to provide access to information for all. It particularly harms library patrons with disabilities or learning issues. One of the great things about e-books is that they can become large-print books with only a few clicks, and most e-book readers offer fonts and line spacing that make reading easier for people who have dyslexia or other visual challenges. Because portable devices are light and easy to hold, e-books are easier to use for some people who have physical disabilities.

Here's the truth: Limiting access to new titles for libraries means limiting access for readers like you.

Macmillan is the only major publisher to propose such an embargo, and readers cannot stay

silent.

The American Library Association and libraries across the country ask you to voice your opposition to Macmillan's new policy by signing this petition and telling Macmillan's CEO John Sargent that access to e-books should not be delayed or denied. We must have #eBooksforAll!

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit ala.org.

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