

September 4, 2019

Samantha Helmick, Chairman
Michael Scott, State Librarian of Iowa
Iowa Library Commission
1112 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 500

Dear Samantha, Michael and Commissioners:

I apologize that I cannot be with you for our next meeting, but I hope this letter can help in the discussion that should occur during the September Commission meeting. I thank you Samantha for calling to our attention the recent announcement from MacMillan Publishers that they are changing their policy on downloadable materials sold to libraries. This is an urgent issue, as their policy takes effect on November 1, and as a stakeholder and voice for Iowa Libraries, we need to take action.

Downloadable e-books and audio books are a convenience to our libraries, and the State of Iowa has designed a consortium to allow libraries all over the state to participate with these formats. Thousands of Iowans are using this service which allows our libraries to provide service 24/7. For those whose lives do not allow regular patronage of their local libraries, the addition of downloadable materials has changed their patterns and lives. More books than ever are being read or listened to through the various formats, enhancing the life-long learning opportunities for commuters, farmers, teachers, vacationers and families.

The MacMillan Publishers' policy says libraries can only buy one copy of their e-books for the first eight weeks after it's published, a rule that has never been in place for physical books. Other book publishers have put several policies in place in the last few years, including making libraries re-purchase an e-book after a certain amount of time or a certain number of rentals. This equates to limiting access for readers, and increasing costs dramatically for keeping a copy available. The e-book publishing world has already hiked the cost per copy dramatically above the cost of a physical copy.

The importance of this issue was not clear to me until further discussion and research demonstrated that restricting access could in fact deter the ability for our libraries, and thus our readers, to acquire information on important issues, and encourage the enjoyable pastime of reading for pleasure. While we currently are able to add additional physical copies to our library collection, if this issue is allowed to slide without comment, the costs per copy could become even more monumental and access to additional copies of physical books, audio books, and movies could become the next target.

Offering free access to information is a basic promise to our communities. Even in Story City, with only 3400 residents, we circulate over 4,000 items each month and the vast majority are books. Through Overdrive, during an average month our patrons download over 300 e-books and another 300 audio books every month. Waiting lists are long for popular titles, but the State Library of Iowa, by managing

the Bridges consortium purchases additional copies. How will this impact this program, and how much can the State and the public libraries afford? This is a warning sign to us that our voices need to be raised in concern.

Please be aware that we must sound an alarm and take a leadership role in helping our libraries learn about this issue, communicating with our publishers and negotiating on behalf of our libraries. This is where we need a strong voice coming from our leadership as commissioners and representing our libraries in Iowa. And we need to bring other states on board for a conversation with our publishers and with our suppliers. This is an issue that can critically impact our ability to offer life-long learning opportunities for all ages, to people with a wide variety of interests.

I'm hopeful this will be the result of this meeting and that the various State Librarians around our country can engage in a thoughtful discussion and presentation in defense of our intellectual freedom.

Sincerely,

Kolleen Taylor, Library Director
Bertha Bartlett Public Library
Story City and Gilbert