

Planning and Development Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6958

AN ACT MAKING CERTAIN TERMS IN ELECTRONIC BOOK AND DIGITAL

Title: AUDIOBOOK LICENSE AGREEMENTS OR CONTRACTS UNENFORCEABLE.

Vote Date: 3/7/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/19/2025

File No.: 268

Disclaimer: *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to protect libraries' ability to access and lend electronic materials like digital audiobooks and e-books under fair terms. It ensures libraries can operate freely by preventing publishers from imposing restrictive clauses, such as limiting loans or prohibiting interlibrary sharing. The bill also guarantees transparency in contracts and allows libraries to preserve and provide long-term access to digital resources. By addressing technological protection measures, it ensures libraries can continue lending materials without hindering patrons' access. Overall, the bill supports libraries in maintaining public access to digital content.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Shannon Angelone, Librarian, West Haven Public Library](#): She shares her personal experience of struggling with vision problems as a child, which made reading difficult until she discovered eBooks in college. With eBooks, she could adjust font sizes, margins, and brightness to make reading easier, which allowed her to read much more. She highlights the ongoing issue that libraries are charged much higher prices for eBooks and audiobooks than consumers, and they cannot even keep the digital content. She emphasizes how eBooks and audiobooks are essential for people with disabilities, including her partially blind mother, who relies on these formats for reading. The librarian argues that libraries should be able to afford

these services to ensure equal access for all, especially for those who benefit from digital content like larger fonts or adjustable audio settings. She concludes by calling for better access to digital books for libraries, noting that such services should not be cost-prohibitive for nonprofit organizations like libraries.

[Emily B. Library Assistant](#): She highlights how the current contract system prevents libraries from building diverse collections that meet patron demand. She describes frustration with long waitlists for popular e-books and the expiration of licenses that make it costly to renew digital titles. Many patrons rely on services like Libby for e-books and audiobooks, sometimes more than physical libraries. She emphasizes that HB6958 would allow libraries to better serve all patrons, especially those with disabilities or learning differences, by providing fairer access to digital resources. She urges lawmakers to listen to constituents and ensure that libraries can access digital materials at reasonable prices.

[Colleen Bailie, Executive Director, West Haven Public Library](#): This testimony from public library leaders emphasizes the importance of equitable access to information, including eBooks, especially highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They point out that publishers' restrictive pricing and licensing practices make it difficult for libraries to provide digital resources, limiting access for residents, especially those who are homebound, rural, or students. The proposed bill would allow libraries to negotiate fair terms with publishers, ensuring access to digital books on reasonable terms. The leaders stress that libraries play a critical role in promoting literacy and lifelong learning and that supporting this bill would help preserve and enhance libraries' ability to provide equitable access to information.

Colleen Bailie submitted written testimony with 54 other people who work in libraries across the state.

[Olivia Blake](#): A Middletown resident and librarian, supports House Bill 6958 based on her personal experience as a library patron, particularly highlighting the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. As an autistic person, she struggles with the logistics and sensory overload of borrowing physical books, making library eBooks a vital resource. However, she often faces long waitlists for digital titles and limited availability, preventing her from accessing the books she wants, especially new releases or books that would help her better understand her experiences as an autistic woman. She argues that libraries should be able to offer the same ease of access to eBooks as they do for physical books, which would greatly benefit people like her who face barriers to accessing traditional library services.

[Catherine Bushman](#): She highlights the increasing demand for eBooks and audiobooks in public libraries, particularly in West Haven, a distressed municipality. Despite limited budgets, the library has made progress in reaching diverse patrons, including those with vision limitations or difficulty traveling to the library. However, the high cost of leasing eBooks and audiobooks limits the collection and results in long waitlists, frustrating both patrons and librarians. The testimony urges support for HB 6958 to help libraries provide these digital resources more efficiently and affordably to those who need them.

[Taylor Cordova, Adult Services Librarian, West Haven Public Library](#): This testimony emphasizes that the primary beneficiaries of digital books and audiobooks are library patrons, not libraries themselves. Libraries serve diverse communities, including those who are homeless, working multiple jobs, or facing educational challenges. Many patrons cannot

afford to buy books or attend classes, making library resources essential. The testimony highlights the financial barriers libraries face in acquiring digital content, which limits their ability to meet the needs of their communities. During the pandemic, eBooks and audiobooks were crucial for providing services remotely. The testimony argues that making digital content more affordable will help libraries offer more resources and support to patrons, especially those facing urgent informational needs, without the constraints of limited budgets and physical space.

[Valerie DiLorenzo](#): Is a certified library media specialist in Connecticut, who supports HB 6958. She describes the challenges she faces managing eBook and audiobook licenses in a high school with over 1,200 students but only one librarian due to budget constraints. Expired licenses create frustration for students, as books need to be removed from the catalog to avoid confusion. She emphasizes that reasonable pricing and longer licenses would alleviate this issue. DiLorenzo also highlights the equity aspect, noting that all students should have access to audiobooks, particularly those who struggle with reading physical books. She shares her personal experience with audiobooks, which have helped her read more and support students' reading habits.

[Catherine Egan](#): She states that most authors earn money from advances, not royalties, and want their books widely available in libraries in all formats. Libraries play a crucial role in promoting reading, especially among young people, and help drive book sales. She emphasizes that libraries are essential in countering the threats posed by online entertainment to literacy and deep reading. She believes passing the bill would benefit authors, libraries, publishers, readers, and communities.

[Anne Erickson](#): As a trustee and board member of the Simsbury Public Library she urges support for HB 6958 from the perspective of a library patron. After being homebound for over a year and a half due to health issues, digital books and audiobooks became essential for the writer. She advocates for making eBooks more affordable for libraries to ensure equitable access to reading materials for the homebound, visually impaired, elderly, disabled, and learning-disabled individuals.

[Glenn Grube, Library Director, Avon Free Public Library](#): The library is primarily funded by taxpayer dollars, with 93% coming from the town and 2% from state and federal grants. Last year, the library spent about \$196,373 on its collection, with nearly \$50,000 spent on e-books and audiobooks. However, these digital resources are often licensed with restrictions on their duration or the number of loans, which Grube argues is an inefficient use of public funds. He compares it to municipal services, noting that such short-term limitations would be unacceptable in other areas, like road construction.

[Clare Hambly](#): " E-books and other digital materials matter greatly to me. I'm not always able to get to the library to borrow print materials and rely on digital materials to complete my reading."

[Manuel Iglesias Fernández](#): This bill aims to protect libraries by ensuring they are not subjected to restrictive contracts that limit digital lending, including interlibrary loans. It ensures libraries can purchase digital materials at the same time as the public without unfair restrictions, create preservation copies, and make informed purchasing decisions through

transparent licensing terms. This bill will ensure digital materials remain accessible, fairly priced, and available, especially for young library users.

[Angela Invernale](#): Some individuals, such as introverts or young children, may not be able to visit libraries in person, but they still deserve access to the same materials as others in the community.

[Michael Invernale](#): " The costs for libraries for digital books, and their expiration dates, are absurd. Libraries spread the word about good books and INCREASE sales when allowed to be permanent assets in a collection."

[Joseph Jankowski, President, Booth & Dimock Library Coventry](#): School and public libraries face high costs for digital materials, paying 4-6 times more than the general public. These materials are leased, not owned, and expire after a short period or limited number of uses, forcing libraries to repurchase them. This system is unfair to taxpayers and limits libraries' ability to serve their communities.

[Alyssa Johnson](#): Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for digital services like e-books has grown, particularly in areas like Meriden, where many people lack the resources to buy digital books or access physical library materials. E-books are especially important for people with disabilities, the elderly, and children who may not have reliable transportation. As a Children's Librarian, I've worked to ensure every elementary school student in Meriden has a library card, making e-books essential, as they eliminate late fees and replacement costs. However, rising e-book prices and unfair licensing terms make it difficult for libraries to maintain collections. With budget cuts and limited funds, libraries cannot afford enough e-books, resulting in longer waitlists.

[Alice Knapp, CEO, The Ferguson Library](#): The main challenges libraries face in providing digital books are the high cost, restrictive licensing terms, and limited availability. Libraries often have to repurchase popular titles due to licensing limits, which exhausts their budget, making it difficult to acquire backlist titles or complete series. This prevents libraries from offering a well-rounded collection and meeting the demand for both new releases and older, in-demand books.

[Jenny Lussier](#): The high cost of leasing eBooks, which can be more expensive than print copies, makes it unfeasible for libraries. Digital collections are important for equity, providing students, especially those with reading difficulties or limited access to public libraries, the ability to choose and engage with reading materials. Access to eBooks and audiobooks is crucial for fostering lifelong readers.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in support of this bill:

[Rory Martorana](#)

[Holly McGrath, Chair, Simsbury Public Library Board of Trustees](#)

[Mike McKenna, Library Media Specialist, Simsbury Public Schools](#)

[Lisa Miceli, MLS Director, Simsbury Public Library](#)

[Allison Murphy, Library Director, Scranton Library](#)

[Brittany Netherton](#)

[Kristen Orth](#)

[Ellen Paul, Executive Director](#)

[Susan Phillips, Library Director](#)

[Anne Porier, School Librarian](#)

[Margaret Prack](#)

[Christine Rinaldi, Librarian, Silas Bronson Library](#)

[Moheba Sayed](#)

[Deborah Schander, State Librarian](#)

[Kate Sheehan, Head of Information Technology, Stratford Library Association](#)

[Sarah Tornow](#)

[Karla Umland](#)

[Rachael Wardin](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Susan Bradford](#): "I oppose this bill. The government seeks to "take" the rights of two parties to make a private agreement. The government keeps TAKING rights without remuneration. STAY OUT OF PRIVATE CONTRACTS."

[Umair Kazi, Director of Policy & Advocacy, The Authors Guild](#): The Authors Guild opposes HB 6958, arguing it could harm authors in Connecticut. The bill seeks to restrict libraries from entering into standard digital material licensing agreements, which often include conditions like limited duration, access, or interlibrary loan restrictions. These terms are necessary for publishers to make digital licensing economically viable. The Guild fears that if these conditions are prohibited, publishers may withdraw from the Connecticut market, leading to fewer available digital books in libraries and reduced income for authors. With many authors already struggling financially, the loss of library licensing revenue would further harm their income.

[Margaret Lynch](#): This bill interferes with the free market by restricting libraries' contracts with publishers, potentially limiting public access to e-books. It could reduce readers' choices, harm authors by affecting their compensation, and discourage future creative work.

Reported by: Austin Adil

Date: 3/28/2025