

Digital books: Libraries fight for fair pricing

The most recent activity in the fight for fair pricing of digital content for libraries has been taking place at the state level. The Maryland General Assembly passed two bills in 2021 requiring publishers who sell e-book licenses to Maryland consumers to also sell licenses to Maryland public libraries “on reasonable terms.” Shortly after the Maryland legislation became law, libraries celebrated when e-book bills passed the New York State Senate and Assembly. Unfortunately, by the end of 2021, the success had proven to be short-lived.

Despite overwhelming bipartisan support of lawmakers and advocates alike, the governor of New York refused to sign the legislation into law. Weeks before the Maryland law was to take effect on January 1, 2022, it was challenged when the American Association of Publishers (AAP) filed a federal lawsuit against the state. Following a hearing on the case, the U.S. District Court granted a preliminary injunction of Maryland’s digital book law in February.

While the Maryland legislation focuses on public libraries, other states have broadened to include academic libraries. As Maryland court proceedings continue towards final adjudication of the complaint, ALA will continue active engagement toward more reasonable access to digital books for libraries. Direct negotiation with the industry—with whom most of the decision-making and authority on library digital book pricing and access rests—is preferred. ALA continues to coordinate with state advocacy efforts as well as work at the federal level to extend some of the rights that libraries have in the print world to the digital environment.

FY 2022 budget closes, FY 2023 federal appropriations cycle begins

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 budget signed by the president in March 2022 had mixed outcomes for libraries. While the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) saw flat funding (despite robust increases proposed in the House-passed version of the bill), the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts received a significant bump from \$167.5 million for each program in FY 2021 up to \$180 apiece in FY 2022.

ALA launched the FY 2023 #FundLibraries campaign during National Library Week (April 3-9, 2022) with the release of the “Dear Appropriator” letters in support of the LSTA and Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) programs for FY 2023. Each year, ALA’s Public Policy and Advocacy Office works with congressional staff to gather congressional signatures for these letters addressed to members of the House and Senate appropriations committees. The circulation of the Dear Appropriator letters marks the first and most influential nationwide advocacy action on the federal budget in any given year. ALA is encouraging advocates to ask their representative and senators to sign the two letters. Information is available at ala.org/takeaction.

ALA kicks off new Unite Against Book Bans campaign

During National Library Week, ALA also launched Unite Against Book Bans, a public campaign to counter the dramatic uptick in book challenges. ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) reported that in one three-month period alone, between September 1 and November 30, 2021, more than 330 unique cases were reported, doubling the number of reports from all of 2020. The goal for the Unite Against Book Bans campaign is to harness the energy of the large majority of Americans that oppose book bans and use their voice in the public arena. In March 2022, ALA commissioned a poll, which showed that 7 in 10 voters oppose efforts to remove books from public libraries, including majorities of voters across party lines. Over the following months, ALA will work to mobilize book lovers from across party lines. To receive regular updates on the campaign and learn how to take action, sign up at UniteAgainstBookBans.org. 🦋