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Reading Library District Seeks to Reverse E-Lending Restrictions through Boycott

For immediate release—Earlier this year, several book publishers altered their lending models to libraries, greatly restricting titles available for public access. Publishers Simon & Schuster and Hachette Book Group placed new limitations on lending times for eAudiobooks before requiring libraries to repurchase the same title, while publishers Macmillan and Blackstone Audio plan to enact separate embargos prohibiting libraries from accessing certain new titles until 60-90 days after release.

In response to these changes and their negative impact on library patrons, libraries of the Reading Library District will join other libraries across the country in boycotting digital audiobooks from these publishers beginning on September 30, 2019, and continuing for six months.

“To say these changes will impact library patrons is an understatement,” said Bronwen Gamble, district administrator for the Reading Library District. “Public libraries were founded on the fundamental principles to serve every community member by providing resources and basic services without charge.

“We allocate money in our budgets to purchase audiobooks from publishers, often at higher cost, so no person from our community is restricted,” Gamble stated. “Access to books, no matter the format, should not be limited due to price or release date.”

OverDrive founder and CEO, Steve Potash, released a statement in August, specifically responding to the embargo from Macmillan Publishers. “The anti-reader, anti-customer-centric, clearly anti-library sentiment is deafening. There is zero acknowledgement by Macmillan of the reality that library ebook readers are Macmillan readers and customers. The high degree of overlap between library users and book buyers is well documented. Libraries build audiences for authors and books, promote reading and discovery, and are a most trusted source for recommendation on what to read next.”

The Reading Library District subscribes to OverDrive, providing thousands of digital books to Berks County residents. In a report run on August 29, new titles purchased from Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, Hachette, and Blackstone Audio circulated in Berks County a total of 2,850 times in the past year, making up more than half of the District's eAudiobook circulation in OverDrive and 11.62% of all OverDrive circulation within the same timeframe.

Public libraries are hoping to send a message to publishers: working with libraries and providing equal access for library patrons is beneficial for all parties.

The boycott will not impact patron access to print or eBook titles. Titles from high-demand authors will still be made available to library patrons in print books, eBook, and audio CD formats. For more information, please visit berkslibraries.org or contact your local library.

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More information about this topic can be found on berkslibraries.org/eAudio-boycott. Please contact Bronwen Gamble at 610-655-6365 or bronwen.gamble@reading.lib.pa.us with any additional questions.