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*eBook embargo unfair to readers*

## **SCLS Board opposes Macmillan eBook embargo**

Wisconsin libraries are all about equal access and convenience, but a decision by Macmillan Publishers to limit libraries to only one copy of newly-released titles in digital formats runs counter to that philosophy.

Wisconsin libraries primarily purchase digital book titles through Wisconsin's Digital Library (<https://wplc.overdrive.com>) hosted by OverDrive, and the plan announced recently by Macmillan Publishers will impose an eight-week embargo on purchasing additional copies of those new titles. That means all public library users in Wisconsin will be limited to sharing a single copy of each new Macmillan eBook statewide for the first eight weeks after it is released. The change took place Nov 1, 2019.

"At a time when libraries are increasing their investment in eBooks to improve the access of residents, Macmillan has dealt a devastating blow to customers by dramatically increasing wait times for their new titles," said Jaime Healy-Plotkin, President of the South Central Library System Board of Trustees.

According to Healy-Plotkin, Macmillan's decision is based on the premise that public libraries undercut publishers' profits by providing free access to eBooks. However, other top publishers have re-evaluated their library lending models without imposing an embargo. For example, Hachette Book Group and Penguin Random House have eliminated long-standing "perpetual access" for libraries in favor of a two-year access model. This equates to electronic expiration dates on titles that require libraries to purchase more copies but does not limit them to a single copy initially.

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“It’s also important to remember that public libraries are already required to pay higher rates for eBooks and eAudiobooks,” Healy-Plotkin said, “at prices four or more times higher than what consumers pay.” Public libraries regularly purchase multiple copies at these inflated prices to meet customer demand.

Public libraries have embraced new technologies and formats to remain relevant and meet customer demand, and in recent years eBooks have become a vital component of statewide library service. To meet demand, libraries adhere to specific “Purchase to Holds” ratios that help to reduce wait times for popular titles. Wisconsin’s Digital Library attempts to maintain a 5:1 holds ratio, which means that for every five holds placed on a title, the consortium purchases one copy. The goal is to meet a maximum wait time of 1.5 months.

Wisconsin’s Digital Library includes 63,773 eBook titles and 21,678 eAudiobook titles, with more than 239,923 items in the statewide collection. In 2018, 5.1 million items were borrowed by library customers across the state, with South Central Library System customers comprising more than 22% of the statewide use at 1,080,875 checkouts.

“Libraries within the South Central Library System are proud of their commitment to excellent customer service,” Healy-Plotkin said. “But those efforts are undermined by the Macmillan eBook embargo, which members of the SCLS Board of Trustees feel will damage library reputations and reduce service to customers. The SCLS Board encourages Macmillan to reverse its policy.”

Library customers who are interested in signing a petition by the American Library Association can do so at <http://eBooksForAll.org>.

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