

Make E-Books Available to All

The Ferguson Library was one of the first public libraries in Connecticut to introduce e-books in the early 2000s. Within the decade, Ferguson and other libraries began offering popular titles via Overdrive. It was clunky but at least you could get some new titles in digital format. I say *some*, because from the very beginning, access has been a problem. Some publishers made titles available right away but at a premium price that was substantially more than physical books. Other publishers delayed availability of titles to libraries. And then there were those, like Amazon, who didn't make the e-book version available at all.

This problem has been complicated by the fact that libraries could only lease these titles; we never owned them. To get access to digital books, we pay an annual platform fee in addition to the cost for each individual title. E-books are typically two to four times more expensive than a new hardcover. And typically, the lease for that title expires in two years or 26 check-outs. We then have to lease it all over again. In a state that has a long tradition of resource sharing, these leased titles are only available to local residents. We cannot loan a title to someone who lives in another town and vice versa.

Right now, Senate Bill No. 131, An Act Concerning Electronic Book and Digital Audiobook Licensing, seeks to address some of these problems. While the Ferguson will still not be able to purchase an e-book, it does address leasing and loan issues. More importantly, the bill requires publishers to lease books to libraries on "reasonable terms."

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Stamford residents' use of e-content has skyrocketed. We have improved our catalog so you can easily see if the title is a physical book or an e-book and it links you directly to the platform for checkout. In a recent survey, respondents told us they wanted more digital content (streaming movies and music as well as e-books and e-audio). I know from personal experience the frustration of waiting for a new title. Reducing the cost of leasing a title is the only way libraries will be able to meet the needs of their communities. Please let your legislator know that you support Senate Bill No. 131.

