



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 432 – Public Libraries – Electronic Book Licenses - Access

SPONSOR: Senator King

HEARING DATE: February 11, 2021

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 432**, which allows public libraries including Prince George's County Memorial Library System and thus the residents of the county, access to electronic books under reasonable terms while complying with the publishers' licensing terms. The reasonable terms include allowing public libraries to purchase electronic books on the same day as the public and in the quantity needed to meet the demand of residents. This office supports Senator King's amendments to expand the scope of the bill to include electronic audiobooks.

Due to their costs or other reasons, for many Prince George's County residents, the public library is their only viable option for reading or listening to electronic books. Those who cannot—or choose not to—spend money on a copy of an electronic book pay taxes to support public libraries, which spend funds to acquire these publications. For the calendar year 2019, Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) circulated 270,755 electronic books. For the calendar year 2020, PGCMLS circulated 392,234 electronic books, representing an incredible 45% year-over-year increase. Similarly, for the calendar year 2019, PGCMLS circulated 232,680 electronic audiobooks. For the calendar year 2020, PGCMLS circulated 268,595 electronic audiobooks, representing a 16% year-over-year increase. Though not as impressive as the ebook increase, this is still a decent growth figure. Since last March, when the pandemic first hit, electronic books in both formats have become more important than ever. Due to COVID-related closures during this time, electronic books were often the only books available to our community.

Our community expects public libraries to provide access to new electronic titles right away. Publishers currently place many restrictions that negatively affect Prince

George's County Memorial Library System's ability to provide residents with electronic books. These include excessive pricing for licenses, which can run two or three or more times the cost of the same content purchased by a private customer on the open market. **Senate Bill 432** remedies several of these restrictions by securing Prince George's County Memorial Library System's ability to purchase electronic books and electronic audiobooks the same day as the public and to purchase sufficient copies to meet residents' demand at fair prices.

Please consider that libraries provide free publicity to publishers and authors by purchasing, promoting their titles, and hosting many authors for events each year. This has a positive impact on the publishers' bottom lines. Libraries provide a public good by providing materials in many formats, thus increasing accessibility to those who cannot use printed material. Publishers sell one of the most important creations of a civilized society—books--we ask them to consider the benefits of contributing to the public good and their bottom line. The residents of Prince George's County stand to benefit from the passage of **Senate Bill 432**.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 432 WITH AMENDMENTS offered by the sponsor to include electronic audiobooks** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.