



Massachusetts Library System (MLS) Written Testimony for H4120: Impact on School Libraries and Students

Dear Committee Members,

The Massachusetts Library System (MLS) provides services to about 1,600 Massachusetts libraries of all types and sizes throughout the Commonwealth. One such service that MLS administers is Commonwealth eBook Collections: The OverDrive K-12 Shared Sora Collection program.

The Commonwealth eBook Collections: OverDrive K-12 Shared Sora Collection program consists of 545+ K-12 MLS member schools in Massachusetts that share the same collection of titles distributed by our partner vendor, OverDrive, and access the titles on the Sora platform. Almost 350,000 students across all parts of the Commonwealth have access to a highly curated collection of 63,000+ eBooks and audiobooks and more schools continue to join the popular program monthly.

The OverDrive K-12 Shared Sora Collection program has always been well received by its participants, and became absolutely vital during the pandemic. Beginning in March 2020 and lasting until start of the 2021-2022 school year, the majority of participating schools were either fully remote or in hybrid learning format.

Due to the interruption in physical access to school library and classroom collections, participating schools increasingly relied on this service as a critical (and often sole) source of accessible books for students, and continue to do so even as students return to physical classrooms.

Providing digital access to school curriculum titles (which includes summer reading) is always important and during the pandemic, it became essential. MLS spent about **\$80,000.00** purchasing just **one** copy of program participants' 2021 summer reading titles in both eBook and audiobook formats, which amounted to a total of **2,677 titles**, averaging **\$30.00** an item.

The majority of the titles were only available for purchase in metered access format, which means that students will lose access to these titles after a set number of checkouts or time (or both).

When was the last time that you 1) paid \$30.00 for an eBook or a downloadable audiobook title that ALSO 2) expired after a period of time?

To further illustrate the inequity that libraries face when purchasing digital content in comparison to what the regular consumer can purchase on their own, consider the title *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds & Ibram X. Kendi. This title in both eBook and audiobook format was one of the most requested titles by schools for summer reading in 2021.

	eBook Price for 1 copy	Audiobook Price for 1 copy
Individual	\$9.99 via Amazon Kindle	\$28.50 via Amazon \$7.95 w/discounted Amazon Audible membership \$0.00 w/Amazon Audible trial
School Libraries	\$45.00 for 24 months then it has to be re-purchased	\$65.00 for 24 months then it has to be re-purchased

The Massachusetts Library System supports H4120, as it would work toward addressing these inequities as shown in the real-life example above. Libraries continue to pay exorbitant prices for digital content, especially at a time when the pandemic has exacerbated the issue and teachers (especially) are increasingly relying on digital content for curriculum support.

In a time when literacy, critical thinking, and social and emotional skills are essential for student growth and success, it is both deeply problematic and heartbreaking to have to make collection development decisions based on the price and restrictive access to digital content, rather than on curating a collection of high-quality content that address student needs.

On behalf of the Massachusetts Library System, I thank you for hearing and reading our testimony and for the many legislators in support of this legislation. I urge you to act on H4120 as soon as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,


Sarah Sogigian, Executive Director


Tressa Santillo, Electronic Resources Manager

Massachusetts Library System (MLS)
11.19.21