

**Testimony of Richard Conroy
President
Connecticut Library Association
Concerning Raised House Bill 5477**

**“AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE-WIDE PLATFORM FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTRONIC BOOKS”
General Law Committee – Public Hearing
March 11, 2014**

Dear Senator Doyle, Representative Baram and distinguished members of the General Law Committee. I am Richard Conroy, President of the Connecticut Library Association, and I am writing in support of Raised House Bill 5477.

Passage of this bill would give Kendall Wiggin, Connecticut State Librarian, a tool that would enable him to begin investigating the possibility of providing ebooks to all Connecticut residents through the Connecticut State Library. This concept is still in the developmental stages. However, it is vitally important that Mr. Wiggin have the option to move forward if he is to conduct meaningful negotiations with the vendors who provide the hardware and software required to implement such a plan.

Furthermore, the language contained in this bill directly addresses one of the recommendations contained in the recently released study of publishers' practices with regard to the sales of ebooks to libraries that was conducted by the Commissioner of Consumer Protection. That study was a direct result of the General Law Committee's efforts, Special Act 13-10, "An Act Concerning a Study Regarding the Availability of Electronic Books to Users of Public Libraries" which was passed by the General Assembly in 2013.

Libraries and librarians are collaborative by nature - it is part of our professional DNA. In addition to the resources we share through the State Library, most of us belong to the Connecticut Library Consortium, as well as one of the three major (LION, Bibliomation, and Library Connection) regional library consortia. We pool our resources this way because we understand the importance of making every dollar count. This is an important means we use to provide the outstanding materials and services that we take pride in bringing to our state's residents.

Most public libraries in Connecticut that provide ebooks to their patrons do so through their membership in one of the three consortia, each of which has a separate agreement with a company called OverDrive that supplies us with a software platform that's used to actually access ebooks. Each consortium then purchases licenses to download individual ebook titles from the various publishers through OverDrive. Our patrons can then use the OverDrive platform to borrow ebooks.

The problem is that a patron with a library card from one consortium can't borrow ebooks from libraries that are affiliated with one of the other consortia, even though all three use OverDrive. For instance, a card holder whose library is affiliated with LION can't borrow an ebook available through a library that belongs to Bibliomation or Library Connection. The same holds true for all of the other possible variations on this scenario.

This is the direct opposite of the model that is in place throughout the state for other materials. As it currently stands, a resident of any Connecticut town can use his or her library card to borrow virtually anything available in the collections of any other public library in the state. What's more, those materials can be delivered to that person's home library in a matter of a few days through the State Library's ConnectiCar service.

Connecticut has led the way nationally in finding a solution to the complicated problems surrounding sales by the major publishers of ebooks to public libraries. This legislation is an extremely important next step toward creating a fair and equitable sales and use environment for both public libraries and publishers. It is also a major step toward providing equal access to electronic materials to all of our State's residents. I urge your favorable action on Raised House Bill 5477.