

Date: July 11, 2025

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager



From: Cathy De Leon, Director, Library, Arts, and Culture



For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Libby E-Book Expansion**

On [April 22, 2025](#), the City Council requested that the City Manager work with Long Beach Public Library (LBPL) to evaluate options to expand access to the library's Libby e-book platform nationwide in response to book censorship and banning occurring in other states. This memorandum provides an update on the request.

Background

The American Library Association [documented](#) 821 attempts to censor library materials in school, public, and academic libraries in 2024. 72% of these attempts were initiated by organized, partisan groups and elected officials to suppress the freedom to read, particularly for young people. Of the 5,813 books that were challenged last year, the majority centered the experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and other persons of color and LGBTQIA+ communities, while some highlighted themes such as feminism and authoritarianism. Examples of challenged books in 2025 included *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, and *1984* by George Orwell.

While California libraries by and large have seen significantly less challenges to the freedom to read, efforts to ban books by neighboring cities has occurred recently. The most notable local effort was led by the city council of Huntington Beach, which voted to create a panel of political appointees to review and evaluate children's books, disregarding the professional expertise of librarians and despite the objections of numerous community members. This effort was overturned via special election in June 2025, with 58% of voters voting to abolish the evaluation panel.

Nor has Long Beach been immune to book banning endeavors historically. A notable effort to ban a book in Long Beach occurred in 1962. Community members objected to LBPL's circulation of *The Last Temptation of Christ* by Nikos Kazantzakis, claiming that the library was promoting communism. Former Director of Library Services Blanche Collins spoke before the City Council, and with the support of Mayor Edwin W. Wade and library supporters, the book was not removed from the collection. This attempt at book censorship led to the founding of the Friends of the Long Beach Public Library in 1963, and book banning continues to be one of its key advocacy issues.

In October 2024, California enacted legislation that has made book banning more difficult. AB 1078 focuses on school libraries and AB 1825 on public libraries, also known as the Freedom

to Read Act. The legislation prohibits the banning of books based on content such as race, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or political affiliation. AB 1825 also adds protections for library workers who are following established policies when making program decisions or refusing to remove books.

Books Unbanned Program

One way in which public libraries have responded to the increasingly coordinated nationwide efforts to censor books is through participation in the Books Unbanned initiative founded by the Brooklyn Public Library in 2022. Funded mostly by private and charitable giving, partner libraries agree to allow teens and young adults from outside their regular service areas to borrow books through their online e-book lending platforms by applying for a digital library card. The e-book lending platform that dominates the public library market is Libby (sometimes referred to by its parent company, Overdrive), which is also Long Beach Public Library's core e-book and e-audiobook platform.

Current library systems participating in Books Unbanned include Brooklyn Public Library, Boston Public Library, Los Angeles County Public Library, San Diego Public Library, and Seattle Public Library. The Long Beach Public Library Foundation (LBPLF) has agreed to raise and contribute funds to the Long Beach Public Library to become a Books Unbanned partner. To formalize this partnership, the City on behalf of LBPL would have to enter into an agreement and MOU with Brooklyn Public Library to utilize Books Unbanned program materials, marketing, and branding.

Potential Impacts

Over 31,000 LBPL cardholders have borrowed over 333,000 e-books or e-audiobooks through Libby in the last 12 months. Library staff estimate that expansion of LBPL's Libby access to youth out of state will add an additional 150-200 users in the first year based on internal analysis and discussions with Books Unbanned participating libraries. This is due to the current size of the LBPL Libby collection and the availability of titles through other partner libraries. While this impact is fairly minimal, it is worth noting that the current holds queue for LBPL Libby materials is nearly 170,000 items long.

To offset any potential impacts by this increase in access to Libby materials, LBPLF will initiate its own fundraising campaign to raise money for the purchase of additional e-book and e-audiobook titles. By increasing the overall size of the Libby collection, it is anticipated that LBPL will be able to support Books Unbanned participants without sacrificing service to existing LBPL cardholders. The cost to the City would be minimal, involving primarily staff time, with LBPL scaling its efforts based on the amount of funds raised by LBPLF. Additionally, Brooklyn Public Library does not charge a fee to member institutions to participate in Books Unbanned.

Implementation and Timeline

Library, Arts, and Culture is presenting an item at the July 22, 2025, Council Meeting to seek approval to enter into the MOU with Brooklyn Public Library for Books Unbanned. Entering into

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this agreement is the most viable option to support a nationwide, coordinated, and intentional expansion of Libby resources to youth who are experiencing restricted access to books. If the MOU is approved, LBPL and LBPLF will work together to coordinate the promotion and implementation of the Books Unbanned program.

LBPL plans to market its participation in Books Unbanned through its website and social media platforms. LBPL would also be listed as a partner organization on the Books Unbanned website and its social media. To participate in Books Unbanned, interested youth would submit an application through the LBPL website and be screened for eligibility requirements including age (open to ages 13-24) and state of residency. Library staff estimate that the program would be up and running by the end of calendar year 2025.

For any additional questions, please contact Cathy De Leon, Director of Library, Arts, and Culture, at 562-570-6291 or via email at cathy.deleon@longbeach.gov.

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