
THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 965
Author: Blakespear (D)
Amended: 4/22/26
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/15/26
AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

SUBJECT: Public libraries: library cards

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill prohibits a public library from requiring that a parent or guardian be present for the issuance of a public library card to a California resident who is 16 or 17 years old. This bill also includes intent language to resolve issues related to liability in the case of lost, stolen, or missing books.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Library Services Act for the purpose of ensuring that all people have free and convenient access to all library resources and services, regardless of where they live or of the tax base of their local government. (Education Code (EC) § 18700 and 18701)
- 2) Defines a jurisdiction as a county, city and county, city, or any district that is authorized by law to provide public library services and that operates a public library. (EC § 18710)
- 3) Defines a public library as a library, or two or more libraries, that serves its residents free of charge and that is operated by a single public jurisdiction. (EC § 18710)

- 4) Defines a school library as an organized collection of printed and audiovisual materials that makes these materials as well as necessary equipment and services of a staff accessible to elementary and secondary school pupils and teachers. (EC § 18710)
- 5) Defines a cooperative library system means a public library system that consists of two or more jurisdictions entering into a written agreement to implement a regional program under the Public Library Services Act and was designated a library system under the Public Library Services Act of 1963 or a successor to that library system. (EC § 18710)

Comments

- 1) *Need for the bill.* According to the author, “there are nearly 1 million residents who are 16 and 17 years old who may be subject to in-person parental consent requirements to get a library card. ... Library card policies for minors vary widely by jurisdiction across the state. ... These different requirements, particularly those requiring a parent or guardian to be physically present, create inconsistent access to a public resource for older teens across the state. ... Parental consent in-person requirements create practical barriers for teens whose parents or guardians may not have the time, availability, or flexibility to accompany them to a library. As a result, an otherwise responsible teenager may be prevented from accessing books, study materials, and employment resources.

This bill would establish a clear statewide standard in California allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to independently obtain and use a public library card. ... [This bill] clarifies eligibility under existing systems while preserving local control over library operations and accountability for materials. Policies regarding lost or damaged items can be addressed through existing library policies. The bill maintains the requirement for a parent or guardian signature on the application while removing the need for in-person presence to get a library card.”

- 2) *Public libraries are run and funded primarily by local governments.* As defined in statute, a public library (also known as a local public library or a local library) is a library, or two or more libraries, that serves its residents free of charge and that is operated by a single public jurisdiction, such as a county, city, special district, or a joint powers authority. Typically, the jurisdiction of the public library designates a central library to coordinate activities among all

the library branches within a jurisdiction. Preliminary 2023-24 data from the Public Libraries Survey show that 187 jurisdictions, with 1,127 sites (including central libraries and their branches), are operating in California. With regard to funding, around 94% of local library funding comes from local governments, and the remaining 6% comes from the state and federal governments.

- 3) *Other initiatives provided library cards for students, but they had limited statewide impact.* Multiple national, regional, and local initiatives have sought to provide library cards for students. One notable prior initiative was called the Student Success Initiative, which was developed by the Pacific Library Partnership and NorthNet Library System in 2016 to create collaborative partnerships between public libraries and schools that provided library cards for students in California. By 2018-19, this project included 70 public libraries with partnerships with schools. Some of these partnerships focused on elementary school students, and others focused on high schools. Though library card policies vary based on the memorandum of understanding between the school district and the library, most of the partnerships included provisions where library cards would be automatically provided to students without the parents' signature, but an opt-out provision would be available for parents who did not want their child to participate. This program has since been folded into the Local Public Library Partnership Program created by SB 321 (Ashby, Chapter 598, Statutes of 2023).
- 4) *Age-old debate on statewide uniformity and consistency vs. reducing local flexibility.* Current law is silent on how 16- and 17-year-olds obtain public library cards, which provides flexibility and discretion for public libraries to determine what is needed for youths under 18 to obtain a library card. Though some public libraries require that parents or guardians be present in person for a child's library card application, some public libraries simply require a signature from a parent or guardian, and some do not require a signature at all, so long as the applicant has proof of identification and residency. Public libraries also do not have a uniform requirement for the age threshold for which an in-person parent is needed, or if a signature is needed. These decisions are currently made locally.

For example, the Los Angeles County Library requires that children under 18 must have a parent or guardian sign their library card application, but doesn't need them to be in person; however, the Los Angeles County Library does require a parent or guardian to be present to fill out a form for a child under 18 to access the internet at the library. Within the same county is the South

Pasadena Public Library, which requires a parent or legal guardian to be in person to sign a library card application for children under 18, with the adult needing to show valid identification with verification of current address.

This bill prohibits public libraries from requiring that parents or guardians be present for the issuance of a public library card to a California resident who is 16- or 17-years old, which would provide for a uniform law on this policy. Opponents of this bill may object to removing the ability for public libraries to make local decisions on a parent's or guardian's in-person presence for the issuance of a library card. This bill does not make other changes to how a 16- or 17-year-old would obtain a public library card.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 321 (Ashby, Chapter 598, Statutes of 2024) established the Local Public Library Partnership Program, under the administration of the State Librarian, to promote collaboration between public libraries and local educational agencies (LEAs) and to ensure that all pupils have access to a local public library by third grade. The bill reflects legislative intent to expand equitable access to library resources for students statewide and reduce barriers to library use through school-library partnerships.

SB 34 (Umberg, Chapter 297, Statutes of 2022) requires the California Department of Education—in an earlier version of this legislation—to administer a competitive grant program to award one-time grant funding to LEAs, library districts, and public libraries for the purpose of providing every public school student with a student success card. SB 34 was subsequently amended to relate to public contracts.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

SUPPORT: (Verified 5/4/26)

Alliance for Children's Rights
Association of California County Boards of Education
Big Brothers Big Sisters of San Diego County
CFT – A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
Children Now
End Child Poverty California
Human Rights Watch

MAAC
The Grauer School

OPPOSITION: (Verified 5/4/26)

California Library Association

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5/5/26 15:55:39

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