

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
SB 965 (Blakespear) – As Amended May 26, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 35-0

SUBJECT: Public libraries: library cards

SUMMARY: Prohibits, beginning January 1, 2028, a public library from requiring the presence of a parent or guardian for the issuance of a library card to a California resident who is 16 or 17 years of age. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Prohibits, beginning January 1, 2028, a public library from requiring the presence of a parent or guardian for the issuance of a library card to a California resident who is 16 or 17 years of age.
- 2) Authorizes a public library to require a parent's or guardian's consent or signature for the issuance of a library card to a California resident who is 16 or 17 years of age.

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 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)
- 6) Authorizes a California public library to participate in universal borrowing. Prohibits a public library participating in universal borrowing from excluding the residents of any jurisdiction maintaining a public library. (EC 18731)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “SB 965 expands access to public libraries for 16- and 17-year olds by prohibiting the requirement for a parent or guardian to be physically present when they apply for a library card. Public libraries provide important access to information, technology, educational resources and safe study places. Many older teens already manage significant responsibilities, and in-person requirements can create unnecessary barriers for families with busy work schedules or transportation limitations. SB 965 does not impact libraries’ ability to require a parent or guardian signature or set policies regarding liability. SB 965 simply removes a procedural hurdle so more teens can access library services.”

Key provisions of the bill. 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 authorizes a public library to require a parent’s or guardian’s consent or signature for the issuance of a library card to a California resident who is 16 or 17 years of age.

Current law allows for local decision-making, but variance in local policies leads to uneven library materials access for older youth. Current law does not specify 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. Some public libraries require parents or guardians to be present 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 does not require 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.

The City of South Pasadena Public Library (Los Angeles County) requires for children (ages 0 to 12) and teens (ages 13-17) a parent or legal guardian must be present to sign their child or teen’s library card application when applying in person. The parent or legal guardian must provide identification or proof of address, and are responsible for all materials borrowed on cards belonging to their children who are under the age of 18.

The Sacramento Public Library requires a parent to sign for anyone under age 18 because they are held financially responsible for anything the minor borrows. The parent (or guardian or caregiver) is authorized to access the account for their minor online. If a minor is under age 12, library staff can give the adult the minor’s borrowing information. For ages 13-17, the responsible adult can only be given this information for items that are overdue. The Sacramento Public Library also offers a second option of a limited card for youth ages 14-17 with a borrow limit of two items without any adult involvement. The rationale is limiting the number of items that can be lost.

For children under 18 years of age, the Colusa County Free Library will provide a library card if the minor is accompanied by a parent or guardian who also provides specified identification.

When developing local policies related to granting access to youth, individual public libraries may discuss and strive to balance materials access, youth privacy, and financial responsibility.

This bill proposes to prohibit 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 the bill 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.

Public libraries are funded and operated 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 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. Regarding funding, around 94% of local library funding comes from local governments, and the remaining 6% comes from the state and federal governments.

Other initiatives to provide library cards for students. 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. Library card policies vary based on the memorandum of understanding between the school district and the library, however most of the partnerships include 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.

Arguments in support. End Child Poverty California writes, "Despite being trusted to work, drive, and make important decisions about their lives and future, in many communities, 16- and 17-year olds are unable to independently obtain a library card. In-person parental-consent requirements can prevent access for those whose parents or guardians are unable to accompany them, limiting access to books, study materials, and employment resources. These barriers are impractical, inequitable, and out of step with the independence already expected of older youth.

SB 965 establishes a clear and consistent statewide standard allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to independently obtain and use a public library card. The bill removes unnecessary procedural hurdles for older teens without creating more work for public libraries. It preserves local control over library operations and allows each library to decide whether a parent or guardian signature is required for an older teen to obtain a library card."

Recommended Committee Amendments. *Staff recommends that the bill be amended as follows:*

- Clarify that a public library shall not require a parent or guardian's consent or signature for the issuance of a library card to a California resident who is 16 or 17 years of age and an emancipated youth.

Related legislation. SB 321 (Ashby) Chapter 598, Statutes of 2024, establishes 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, would have required 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. This bill was subsequently amended into a different jurisdiction.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Alliance for Children's Rights
Association of California County Boards of Education
Big Brothers Big Sister San Diego
CFT – a Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
Children Now
Grace Institute - End Child Poverty in CA
Human Rights Watch
MAAC Project
The Grauer School

Opposition

None on file

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