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Mr. John Read
Chief Litigation III Section
Antitrust Division
U.S. Department of Justice
450 5th Street, NW, Suite 4000
Washington, DC 20530

June 22, 2012

Dear Mr. Read,

Maybe I am not the first person to point this out, but I find it ironic that your last name is Read and you're involved in the anti-trust suit filed against the publishers who allegedly colluded to form the agency model for ebook pricing and the written word is the very thing that may be destroyed as a result of these actions. I'd like to take this opportunity and let you know the reasons I think this suit is the exact wrong thing for our country, especially during these difficult times.

I am a reader, always have been, always will be. Today I find myself lucky enough to work with books day in and day out and I'm terrified to imagine what could happen if the DoJ and Amazon are successful in their pursuits. I never thought that, at age 32 or any other age to be frank, I'd find myself imagining a world without not only the written word, but mom and pop stores across America. But, if the DoJ sides with Amazon and eliminates the agency model for eBook pricing, that is the first nail in the coffin of both.

And it's a shame, isn't it? Freedom of speech and commerce are two of the things upon which our great nation were founded and I'd like to think this is still true, but actions of late by the Department of Justice have led me to think otherwise. I hate to imagine a world where our leaders support a giant corporate entity rather than the thousands upon thousands of small businesses that are really what makes our country so successful. By siding with Amazon, this is what you are doing. You're telling independent business owners, not just booksellers, that it's okay to not remit sales tax, crippling individual state economies that are already in dire straits. You're saying that it's okay to squash the little guy like a bug under your foot, simply because you don't want the competition. You're saying that you'd rather your children and grandchildren receive book recommendations from an algorithm than someone who knows them and their tastes.

In 2011, the American booksellers association added 55 new members, fantastic news for communities across the nation. Why, in this increasingly competitive market, was this possible? I see three main reasons:

- 1) The public has spoken, they miss seeing the bookstores that have been cornerstones of their communities for decades. Many of these stores did not weather the storm created by the downturn in our economy and Amazon's introduction of the Kindle. But many new stores have opened, bridging the gap left by closures. These stores sell eBooks and have embraced the digital age of the book and are thriving.
- 2) The agency model allows Indie bookstores to sell eBooks and compete on an even playing field with Amazon.

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- 3) Indie booksellers have banded together, no longer viewing the stores in neighboring communities as competition, but as brothers and sisters in arms. Sending the message to the DoJ and Amazon that we are not to be trifled with, that we will not go down without a fight. And that we are the future, not large corporate entities like Amazon.

My local bookstore opened in 1992. I was 12. That day in early summer of '92 changed my life forever. The other store in my town at that time was a chain and you could tell. While I live in a small town with a year-round population of 7,000 like *Cheers* "where everybody knows your name," they didn't know me or what I liked because they didn't care. The other store didn't bring authors to their store, giving me the chance to meet authors I'd read and become amazed and inspired. The other store didn't see me walk in, go grab a book they knew I would love without me even uttering a word.

I'm not here to tell you all chains are bad. Barnes & Noble gave Indies the nook, a viable device with which to sell eBooks. Apple, one of the largest companies in the world, gave the world the iPad, another device I on which I can buy eBooks from my local bookseller. The best part is my money stays in my state and fuels it's fragile economy... one of the worst in the nation. But herein lies the rub, those organizations are willing to share, for the sake of the future of the written word. Amazon wants the entire pie to themselves.

Unlike what they teach you in grade school, monopolies are legal in this country as long as there is no competition. If the DoJ is successful, they have created a situation in which there is no competition for Amazon. Amazon did not do this, our so called commerce-supporting government did. That's not right, and now more than ever I fear for the future of one of the greatest nations on Earth. You may think I am extrapolating this to the extreme and that this is a much smaller issue, but it's truly not. This is just another nail in the coffin of books and small businesses. It's a deplorable action motivated by greed and I'd hate to see it come to fruition.

You don't know me, we've never met, but I'd like to hope that this letter has not fallen on deaf ears. I'd like to think that I am a part of the next generation of leaders of this country and am here to shout from the mountaintop that this is wrong. Wrong for books and wrong for America. I urge you to think about growing up in a world where you can't walk to your downtown center and purchase a book, hockey stick, or pair of shoes from a person and not by clicking a mouse. Think about not only small town America, but all towns in America because this suit has implications for both, maybe not tomorrow or in three months, but in the long-term.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth (Bess) Bleyaert, Concerned Citizen