

# Eliminating Late Fines at LPL

## Recommendation

After examining the question carefully, library administration recommends that the Lawrence Public Library Board of Trustees eliminate the billing and collection of late fines for all materials returned or renewed late. Library staff will continue to block library cards and bill for lost and damaged materials on a reasonable and regular schedule. Following this change, we also recommend that all current late fees be waived from all patron accounts. All other charges relating to lost or damaged items will remain in place.

## How have we done it up to this point?

**LPL has charged library fees on the following schedule:**

<b>Material Type</b>	<b>Overdue Charge</b>	<b>Maximum Overdue Charge</b>	<b>Billed for Replacement</b>
Chromebooks	\$1 per hour	\$50	50 hours overdue
All other materials	\$0.15 per day per item	\$4.50	30 days overdue

- Items returned with damage are billed for replacement at the time of return.
- Library card accounts are blocked from access when the balance reaches \$10 or more.
- Accounts with \$25 or more in lost or damaged charges are referred to collection 45 days after the fees are incurred. A non-refundable \$15 fee is assessed, and the account must be paid to \$0 before access is restored.

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## Should we consider it?

### From LPL's Strategic Plan - Strategic Initiatives: Innovation<sup>1</sup>

The Library will continually rethink traditional library services:

- Continuous environmental scanning of other libraries and customer needs.

In the library world, the debate over late fees has gone back and forth for decades. The literature is filled with opinion pieces on the issue, with some touting the necessity of the age old practice, and others lamenting the many issues it creates.<sup>2</sup> According to a 2017 Library Journal survey, 92% of respondents still rely in part on library fees for revenue.<sup>3</sup> However, the number of libraries going fine free continues to grow. Endlibraryfines.info links to 93 news reports of libraries going fine free just in 2019 alone.<sup>4</sup> The Urban Library Council and Endlibraryfines.info each maintain maps showing hundreds of libraries across the country and the world that have self reported as going completely or partially fine free.<sup>5</sup> Examples range all over the country. Chicago Public Library just became the largest library system in the country to eliminate fines, and nearer to home, Kansas City Public Library went fine free earlier this year.<sup>6</sup> On a nationwide scale, the American Library Association officially came out against charging fines during its 2019 Midwinter Meeting.<sup>7</sup> This all adds up to not a fad, but rather a question worthy of serious consideration.

The following discussion will look at the reasons typically cited for charging late fees, and why we may want to reconsider the practice. We'll also discuss the practical aspects of how we might go about eliminating them, and what we can reasonably expect from such a change.

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# Why have we done it?

Other than tradition, what are the real world reasons for charging late fines?

There seem to be **three main reasons** commonly cited for charging and collecting late fees:<sup>8</sup>

1. To encourage the timely return of materials.
2. To generate revenue for the library.
3. To promote the value of responsibility in the community.

## 1. To encourage the timely return of materials

Practical argument. If patrons are charged fees for late returns then they will be more likely to return their items on time.

From a circulation perspective this would seem to be the most convincing argument. If fines encourage the timely return of materials, ultimately resulting in greater availability to the public, then they could be considered beneficial.

Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case:

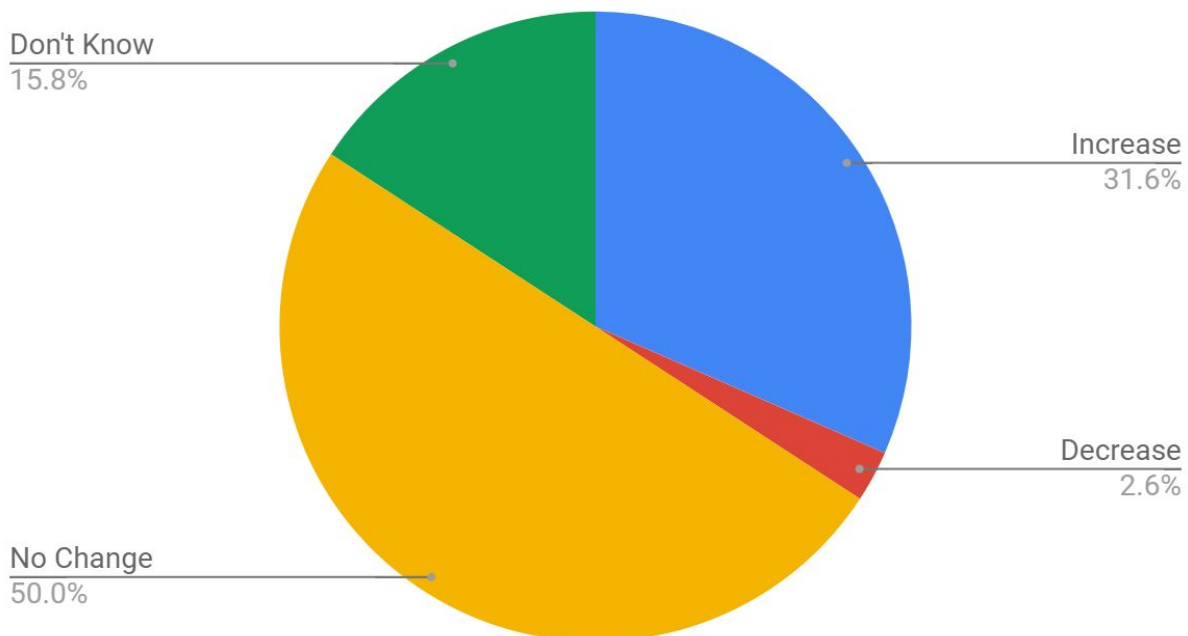
1. Overdue rates are not substantially impacted by late fines.
2. Hold queues and ordering are not hurt when a library goes fine free.
3. Overall circulation rates tend to remain steady or increase with fine removal.

**Overdue rates are not substantially impacted by the presence of late fines.**

- The overwhelming body of empirical research that demonstrates late fines encourage the timely return of materials, that you would expect to exist with such a long running practice, *does not exist*.
- Any empirical research that does exist indicates that small fines do not significantly impact overdue returns.<sup>9</sup>

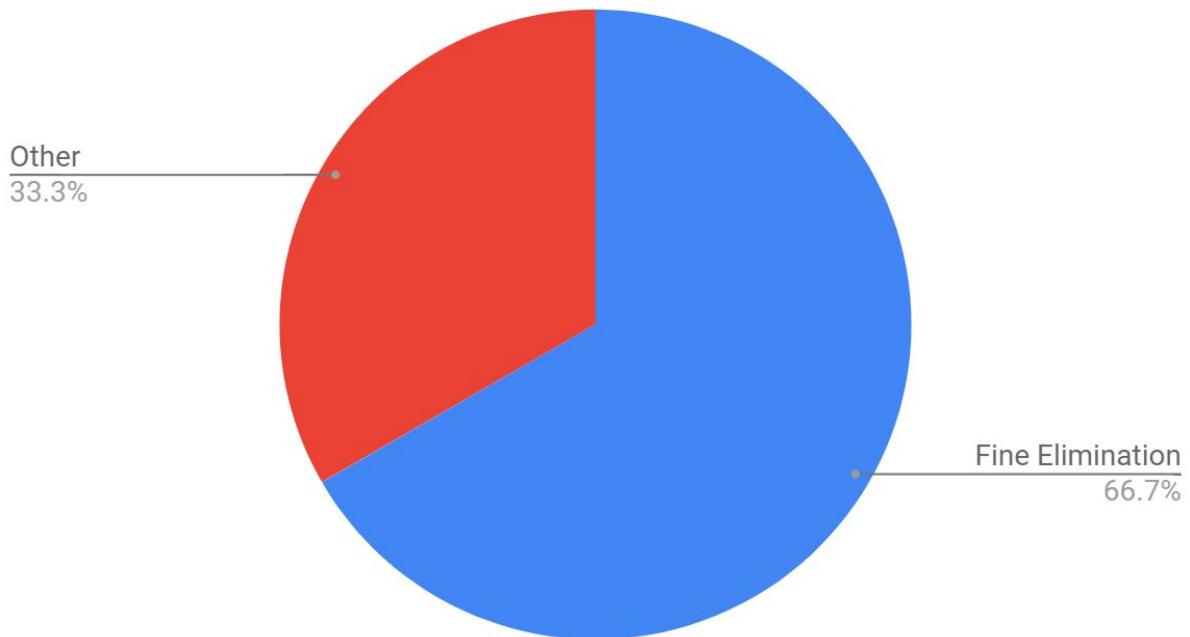
- In some cases, fine elimination seems to cause an increase in short term overdue rates but a decrease in long term overdue rates. More late items ultimately come back.<sup>10</sup> In the weeks since eliminating fines Chicago Public Library reports a 240% increase in the return of long overdue items.<sup>11</sup> Along the same lines, libraries that have amnesty programs have seen huge numbers of long overdue or lost items returned when the fear of fines disappears. Chicago Public Library, Los Angeles Public Library, and San Francisco Public Library have reported hundreds of thousands of dollars in returned materials during such programs.<sup>12</sup>
- Many libraries that have gone fine free independently report no significant long term increase in overdue returns.<sup>13</sup>
- In our own small survey of 55 libraries around the country that have gone fine free on all or a part of their collection, we asked about overdue returns.

Have you seen a change in overdue returns after going fine free?



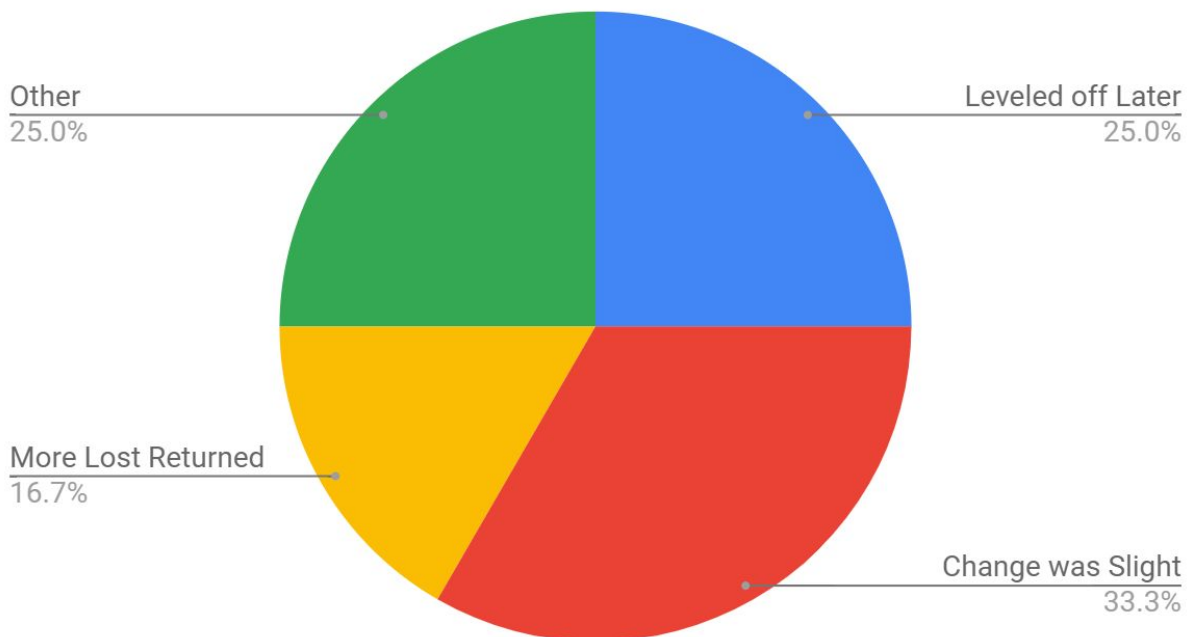
- Most saw no change or a decrease in overdue rates.

Do you attribute fine elimination to your increase in overdue items?



- Of libraries that reported an increase in overdue returns, 66% attributed the increase to the removal of fines (21% of total respondents). The remaining 33% were unsure.

Breakdown of libraries reporting an increase in overdue returns



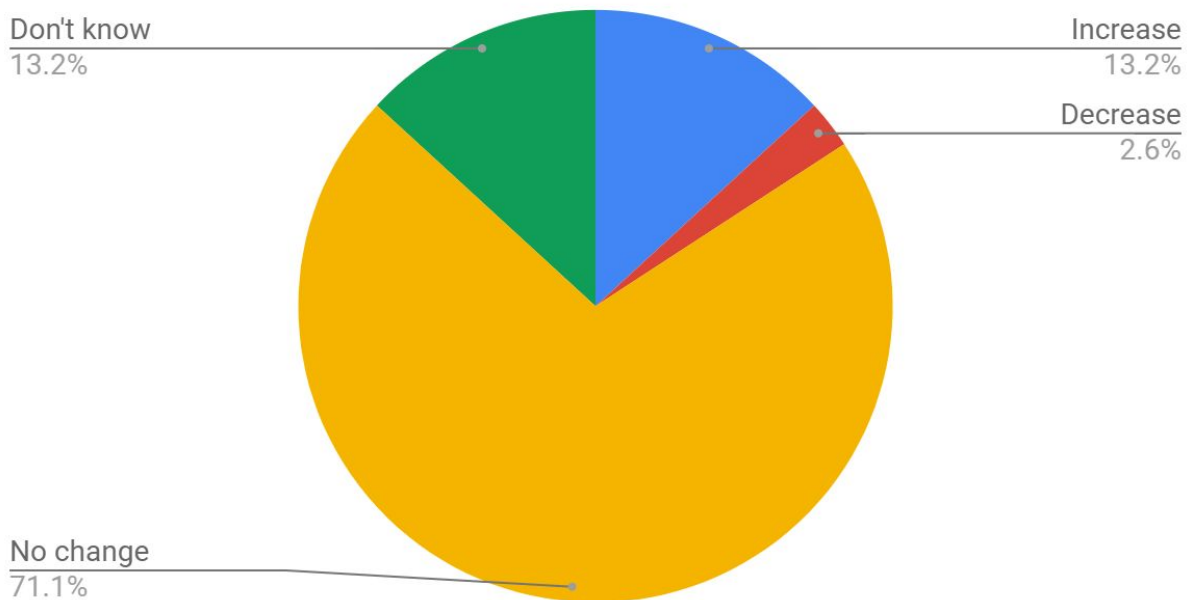
- Also, of libraries that reported an increase, 75% reported that the change was very slight, leveled back out later, or was paired with an increase in the return of lost items.
- LPL's Book Van population is not charged late fees and have a lower overdue return rate than the general patron population.
  - From 2017 through 2018, 11.7% of items borrowed by book van patrons were returned late. That is in contrast with the higher 13.06% late return rate on items borrowed by non-book van patrons.
  - To be fair, book van patrons represent a very small part of the Lawrence community (511 registered patrons or 0.55% of the total patron population) and their interaction with the library is not entirely representative of the average patron. However, it is interesting to note their overdue return rates are not significantly different than the fine paying patron population at large.

Non-Book Van Patrons	Year	2017		2018		Total	
	On Time vs. Overdue	# of Checkouts	% of Checkouts	# of Checkouts	% of Checkouts	# of Checkouts	% of Checkouts
	On Time	751,442	86.78%	746,857	87.10%	1,498,299	86.94%
	Overdue	114,510	13.22%	110,610	12.90%	225,120	13.06%
		865,952	100.00%	857,467	100.00%	1,723,419	100.00%
Book Van Patrons	Year	2017		2018		Total	
	On Time vs. Overdue	# of Checkouts	% of Checkouts	# of Checkouts	% of Checkouts	# of Checkouts	% of Checkouts
	On Time	11,520	89.38%	11,251	87.22%	22,771	88.30%
	Overdue	1,369	10.62%	1,648	12.78%	3,017	11.70%
		12,889	100.00%	12,899	100.00%	25,788	100.00%

**Hold queues and ordering are not hurt when a library goes fine free.**

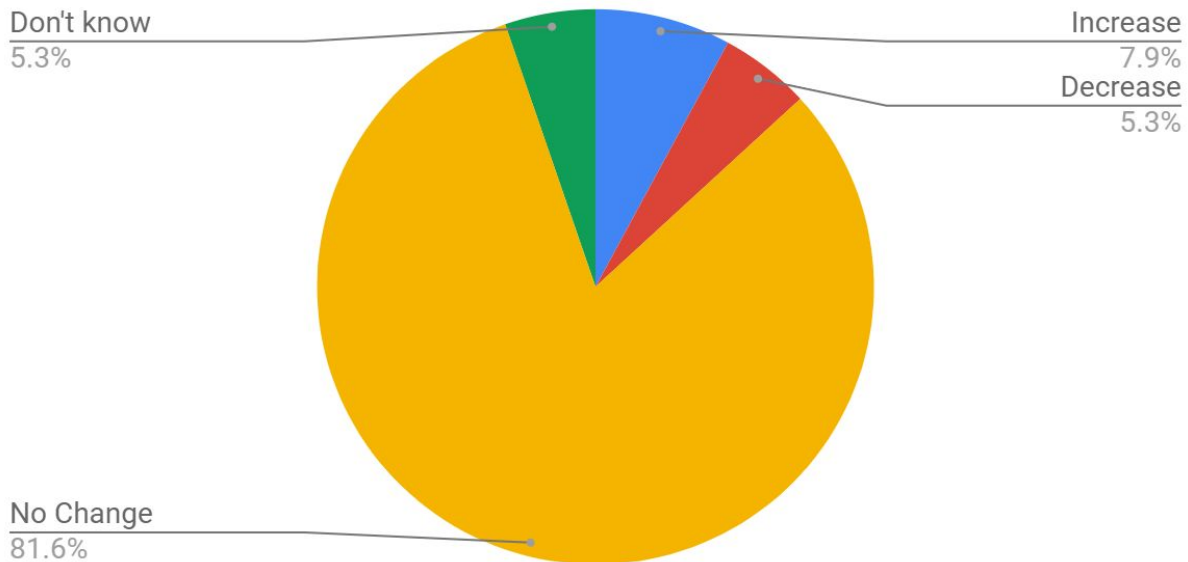
- A concern among many libraries considering fine removal is that hold queues will take longer to fill if there are no fines. A similar fear is that a higher number of items would have to be purchased to meet hold demand.
- This fear appears to be unfounded. Many libraries that have gone fine free report no changes in this area.<sup>14</sup>
- In our own small survey we asked this question and found the majority of respondents saw no change.

Have you seen any change in the length of hold queues after going fine free?



- Of the three libraries that reported an increase in hold queue length, one attributed the increase to the addition of an extra renewal and a general increase in circulation, one noted that the change was very slight, and one linked the increase to parents using their children's cards for holds (this was a library that eliminated fines to youth cards only).

Have you had any change in the number of items you have to order since going fine free (including replacements or added copies to address holds)?



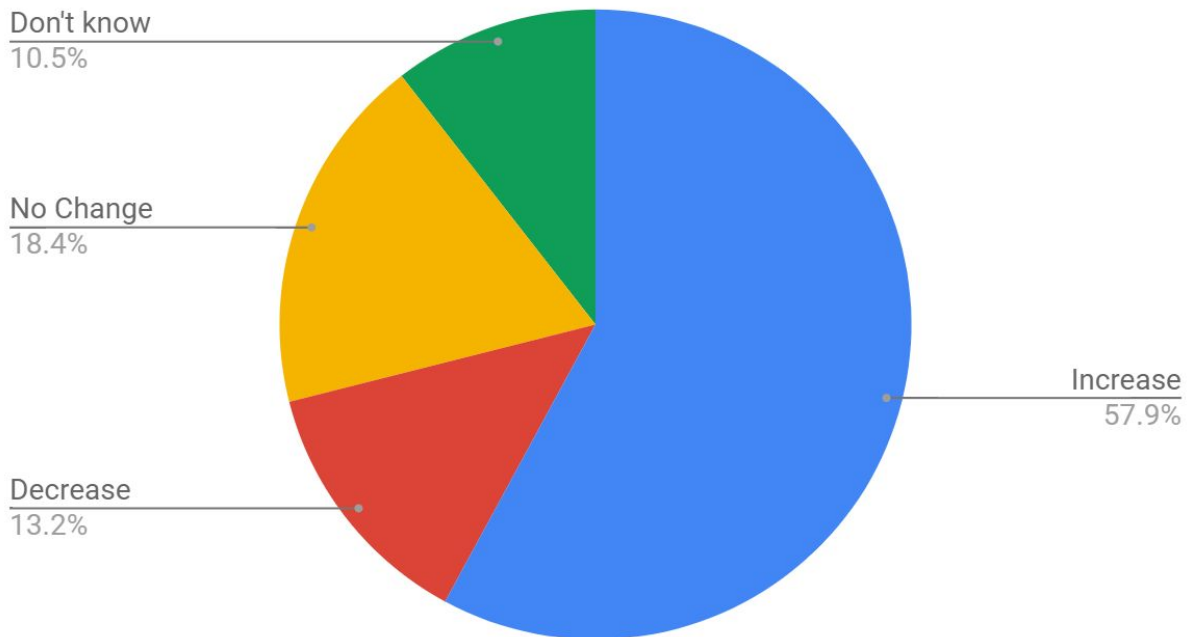
- None of the libraries that reported an increase in ordering attributed the change to fine elimination.

**Overall **circulation** rates tend to stay the same or increase with fine removal**

- Some libraries report no change in circulation with the removal of late fees. Others report an increase in circulation. This is usually attributed to an influx of patron previously blocked for fines or who avoided borrowing for fear of fines.<sup>15</sup>
- The majority of respondents in our survey reported an increase in circulation when they went fine free.



Have you seen any change in circulation totals after going fine free?



- Those that reported a decrease attribute the change to other factors such as recent renovations, changes in collection size, or the general nationwide downward trend in circulation.

## 2. To generate revenue for the library.

Practical argument. Fines provide a source of revenue for the library.

Library fines are also a very common source of funding for libraries across the country. Three questions we can ask about using late fines in this manner are:

1. How much of our revenue comes from late fees?
2. Is it appropriate to raise money for the library in this manner?
3. Do library fees have their own costs?

**LPL does plan for a certain amount of fine revenue in its yearly budget.**

- The “Overdues” line in the 2018 Budget was \$148,400. This accounted for about 3.2% of expected total revenues.

- The “Overdues” line actually includes *all* fees taken from patrons, including late fees, lost and damage fees, associated processing fees, and collection fees.
- Revenue from actual late fines ends up being around \$120,000, or **2.6%** of total revenues. That’s approximately 0.8% for fines from the youth collection, and about 1.7% for the adult collection.

#### Overdue vs. All other fees 2017-Sept 2019

Bill Payment Year	2017	2018	2019	Total
Bill Reason	Payment Amount	Payment Amount	Payment Amount	Payment Amount
OVERDUE	\$129,879.82	\$119,746.71	\$78,698.15	<b>\$328,324.68</b>
NON-OVERDUES	\$35,990.74	\$34,718.48	\$24,506.25	<b>\$95,215.47</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$165,870.56</b>	<b>\$154,465.19</b>	<b>\$103,204.40</b>	<b>\$423,540.15</b>

#### Overdue, Lost, Damage, Processing, Collection, Misc 2017-Sept 2019

Bill Payment Year	2017	2018	2019	Total
Bill Reason	Payment Amount	Payment Amount	Payment Amount	Payment Amount
OVERDUE	\$129,879.82	\$119,746.71	\$78,698.15	<b>\$328,324.68</b>
LOST	\$18,809.15	\$17,367.62	\$12,224.45	<b>\$48,401.22</b>
DAMAGE	\$5,217.28	\$5,799.74	\$4,583.35	<b>\$15,600.37</b>
PROCESSING	\$6,414.86	\$6,948.26	\$4,785.04	<b>\$18,148.16</b>
COLLECTION	\$5,538.45	\$4,552.55	\$2,905.41	<b>\$12,996.41</b>
MISC (RETURNED CHECK, LIBRARY CARD REPLACEMENT, ETC)	\$11.00	\$50.31	\$8.00	<b>\$69.31</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$165,870.56</b>	<b>\$154,465.19</b>	<b>\$103,204.40</b>	<b>\$423,540.15</b>

- Current unpaid late fees in the system total \$297,876.59 (mid September 2019). Ideally these will be waived with the elimination of late fees.

Total Unpaid Fees in the System	Total
Total unpaid fees	\$1,103,166.68
	40,087 Patrons
Non-overdue fees	\$805,290.09
	12,127 Patrons
Overdues	\$297,876.59
	35,472 Patrons

### Should we generate revenue with late fines?

- The **American Library Association** has recently come out against charging late fees whenever possible.<sup>16</sup>
  - From the “Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity (2019)”
    - “The American Library Association asserts that imposition of monetary **library fines creates a barrier to the provision of library and information services.**”
    - “urges libraries to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and ***actively move towards eliminating them***; and”
    - “***urges governing bodies of libraries to strengthen funding support for libraries so they are not dependent on monetary fines as a necessary source of revenue.***”
- LPL’s **Mission Statement** has something to say about fees.<sup>17</sup>
  - Core services without charge. We provide basic library services free of charge.
    - Although late fees are certainly voluntary, \$120,000 a year is a lot of money for services provided “free of charge.”

## **There are costs to collect fees.**

Many libraries cite costs associated with collecting fines as cancelling out much or all of the revenue generated by them.<sup>18</sup> While we may not be able to say quite as much with library fines collected by LPL, there is definitely a cost to collecting fines.

### **➤ Technology and service subscriptions at LPL**

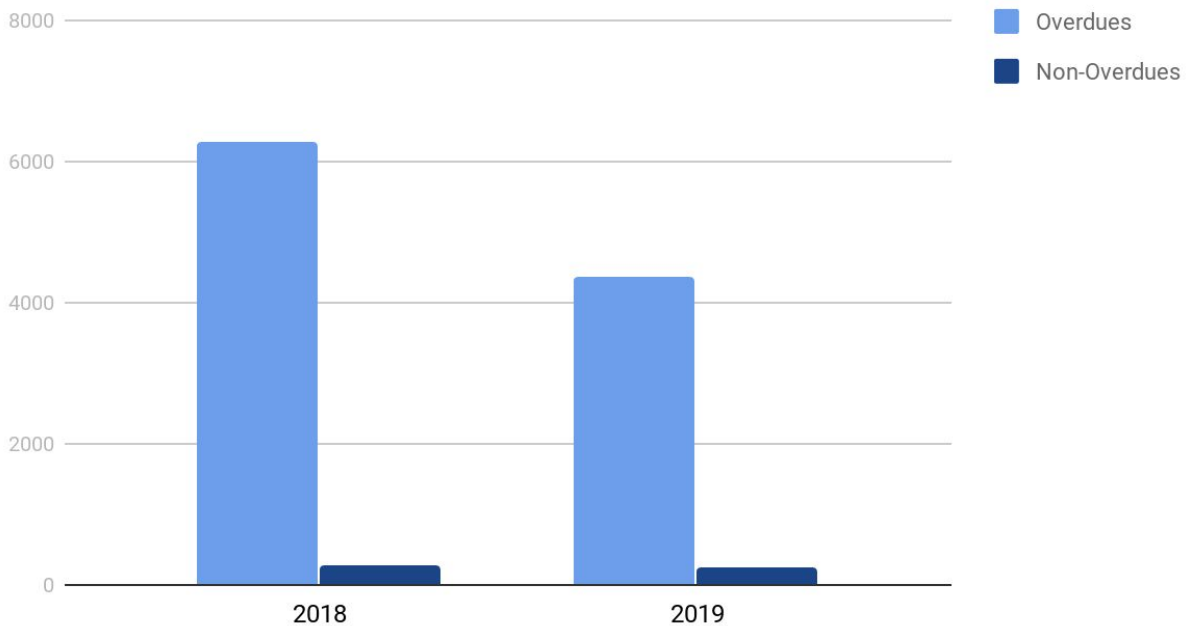
- From 2014-2018 combined equipment purchase fees, equipment maintenance fees, and credit card service fees for patron payments made to the library total \$51,313.74.
- Total credit card service fees (classified under the expenses line) paid by the library in 2018 just for overdues was \$5,359.24.
- Annual subscription fees for running credit card transactions at the self checks has been \$3,000 per year, and will increase to \$3,200 a year starting in 2019.
- If we go fine free we can reasonably eliminate fee payments through the self check machines. Counting self check subscription fees plus credit card processing fees for overdues, that will result in a savings of approximately \$8,500 per year.
- These fees subtracted from the \$120,000 of expected fine revenue brings the total down to \$111,500, or 2.4% of expected revenue.

### **➤ Staff and patron time** better spent teaching about and utilizing library resources is wasted haggling over and paying late fees. It is difficult to quantify the exact amount of time spent, but we can measure some factors.

- **The Accounts desk:**
  - According to our ILS Symphony, in 2018 6,555 individual patrons paid \$77,941.50 fees at the Accounts desk. Of those, \$54,888.79 were for late fees, involving 6,268 patrons.
  - 1,437 patrons had overdue fees of \$10,762.01 waived at the Accounts desk. Each of these transactions would have included an extended interaction between the staff and the patron regarding the reason for the waiver.

- Staff talley sheets from 2016 through 2018 record 21,960 interactions with patrons that specifically involved paying fees at the Accounts desk. This does not include simple inquires involving fees in person, over the phone, or via email regarding fees.

### Number of Individual Patrons Paying Fees at the Accounts Desk



- **Bookkeeping:**

- Denise Berkely is LPL's Accounting Specialist. On a daily basis she balances the actual monies received by the library against what is reported by the ILS, the self check machines, the website, the Square reader, and the cash register. She estimates spending about 3 hours per week on these tasks, or about 156 hours per year, or 936 hours since 2014. That is about 12% of her work time at LPL. This does not include time spent by Denise and the Accounts Coordinator researching discrepancies, which accounts for an extra hour or two a month. This time would not disappear with the elimination of fines, but it would be reduced.

- **IT Support:**

- Kim Fletcher is LPL's Technology librarian, system administrator for our ILS, and main support for our sorting machine and fleet of self check machines. Kim counts approximately 40 official help tickets that she has submitted to Bibliotheca or SirsiDynix over the last five years directly related to payment issues. Each involved lengthy back and forth communication with the vendor. Resolution time for these issues varied from hours to weeks. She estimates dealing with another 50 cases over the last five years involving in house troubleshooting of payment issues on the self check machines. Since 2012, approximately 40 official inhouse tickets have been submitted to our technology department regarding payment issues from the Accounts Coordinator alone.

- **Bottom line on staff hours and late fines:**

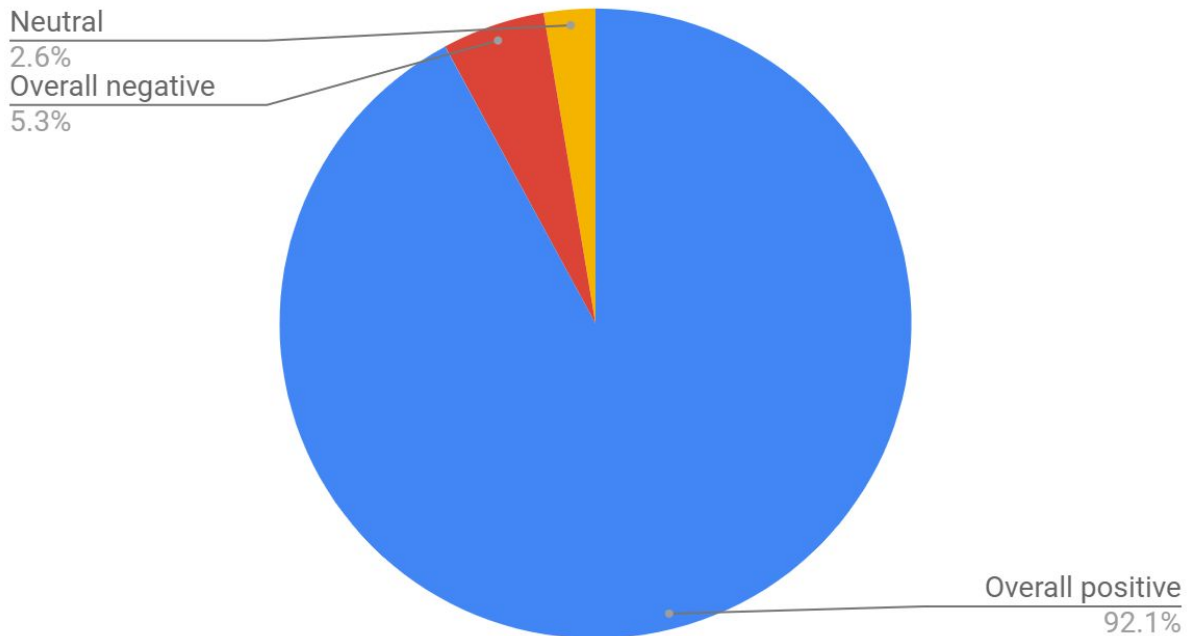
- Although eliminating late fines will reduce the workload on staff, we are not recommending any reduction in staff hours.
- In the long term it may be possible to reduce Accounts desk staff hours through attrition, however we will not know if such a thing would be possible until after living in a fine free world.
- In the short term there are many other regular tasks to which staff can devote their attention. We can also look at expanding service in areas such as outreach.

➤ **Customer Experience:**

- The Accounts Department has the wonderful privilege of issuing library cards, the literal key to accessing all of LPL's fantastic resources, to every new patron that walks through the doors. Unfortunately, we are also routinely placed in a punitive role, squabbling over missed due dates and small fees that add up to blocked access. Beyond a doubt, the number one source of conflict between Accounts staff and patrons are late fees.

- Libraries that eliminate late fees consistently report improved perception of the library by the public, as well as better relations between staff and their patrons.<sup>19</sup>
- In our own survey, the response was overwhelmingly positive when asked about overall experience when going fine free.

How would you rate your library's experience with eliminating fines?



### 3. To promote the value of responsibility in the community

Value based argument: The library should promote responsibility in the community. There is a tangible penalty for not returning your items on time. Responsibility is encouraged by holding patrons to this standard.

Responsibility certainly is an important value. However, when examining it in relation to library fines there are several key points to consider.

1. Responsibility exists as an inherent part of the borrowing process with or without the existence of late fines.
2. Responsibility is a hard thing to measure and may not be aided with fines.
3. Pursuing the value of responsibility through the use of late fines negatively impacts other fundamental library values.
4. Late fines block access, and not always equitably.

**Eliminating late fines does *not* eliminate responsibility inherent with borrowing from the library.**

- Library items are still provided as a loan, not a gift. They are borrowed on the condition that they will be returned in good condition and on time.
- Although fines may disappear, fees will not.
  - Automatic billing for lost items would still continue on a regular interval. Items returned with damage will also be billed.
  - Accounts with replacement costs of \$25 or more will be submitted to collection after 45 days. LPL submits about 700 accounts to collection per year. Approximately 300 accounts in collection are paid off per year.
  - Until payment is received or lost items returned, patrons with lost and damaged materials will be blocked from further borrowing.
  - Of the roughly \$1,098,489.24 fees in the system, \$803,938.73 are for lost, damaged, and collection fees. These fees will remain in place with the elimination of late fees.
- If we eliminate fines, we propose temporarily blocking access on accounts with items two weeks late. This block will be lifted with the return of the item. This measure is actually more severe than waiting until a patron has reached \$10 in fines, as no single item will ever reach that high a fine.
- By eliminating fines but keeping fees, we will maintain the motivation for returning items, i.e. continued borrowing privileges. At the same time, we will be eliminating what amounts to a punishment after the fact that keeps some patrons from ever returning.



**Responsibility is difficult or impossible to **measure** as an outcome.**

We can't tell if fines actually have an impact on responsibility.

- LPL Strategic Plan: "The Library will establish a process for outcomes evaluation."<sup>20</sup> How do we count how much responsibility we are creating with fines?
- Of the roughly 53,000 patrons that have been active in the system since 2017, about 32,000 have had some sort of fee charged to their account, and about 25,000 have had an overdue fee. Do we count that as a success or a failure?
- If late fines encourage responsibility, why do overdue rates tend to be the same with or without them?
  - The only objective measure we can place on responsibility in this context says fines make no difference.

**Responsibility is **not** encouraged with late fines, at least not the kind of responsibility we are interested in fostering.**

- The consequence faced for not returning your items on time should not be a financial penalty but the knowledge that you deprived another person of a community resource.
- Charging patrons late fees lets them pay their way out of responsibility. Patrons at LPL routinely rationalize their fine payments as "their donation to the library." The message we send is: sure, they kept the item past the due date, but they paid for the privilege, so it is okay. Late fees become extended use fees.
- From LONG OVERDUE: Eliminating Fines on Overdue Materials to Improve Access to San Francisco Public Library, "Missing deadlines, misplacing items, having to change plans, and reprioritize —these are universal human realities. Overdue fines do not turn irresponsible patrons into responsible ones, they only distinguish between patrons who can afford to pay for the common mistake of late returns and those who cannot."<sup>21</sup>

**For libraries, the value of ensuring *access* is greater than the value of promoting responsibility.**

- Responsibility is an important value but arguably outside the library's primary mission. When pitted against the *core value* of ensuring access, it necessarily comes in second. We are here to provide access to information, not punish patrons for tardiness.

**Fines are a *barrier to access*. Ensuring access is among our *fundamental values*.**

- **The American Library Association opposes the creation of barriers with fees.<sup>22</sup>**
  - From the Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, "The American Library Association fundamentally opposes the creation of economic barriers to access services and resources provided by publicly funded libraries, including public, school, and academic libraries. All resources provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of format or method of delivery, should be readily and equitably accessible to all library users. Imposing any financial barrier may disadvantage users, and libraries of all types—public, school, and academic—should consider eliminating barriers that limit access to library resources and other services."
  - "Libraries should examine policies and procedures, particularly those involving fines, fees, or other user charges, and actively move toward eliminating any that may create potential barriers to access or academic achievement."
- **LPL's Mission Statement has something to say about access.<sup>23</sup>**
  - Access to information. We ensure access to information for people of all ages, abilities, and means.

**Late fines present an *equity issue*.**

The library is the cultural and social hub of the community for everyone from all walks of life and points of origin. It's a place where people new to the

community, or even the country, can learn about what it is to be an American and share their various points of view and experiences. Library fines can derail this process by disproportionately impacting certain parts of this population. *Patrons living at or below the poverty line are particularly affected.*

➤ **The American Library Association has focused on fines as an issue negatively impacting lower income patrons.**

- The ALA policy manual in B.8.10 Library Services to the Poor states, “The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all persons, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults, and families in America.” The first policy objective states libraries should be, “Promoting the removal of all barriers to library and information services, *particularly fees and overdue charges.*”<sup>24</sup>
- From the Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, “Libraries and their governing bodies should look for alternative models and methods of administration that minimize distinctions among users based on their economic status. They should *resist imposing user fees to alleviate financial pressures* on the library, as those fees may impose a long-term cost to institutional integrity and public confidence in libraries. Likewise, they should *not enact policies that cater to the desires of the economically fortunate at the expense of the economically unfortunate.*”<sup>25</sup>

➤ **Empirical research on equity in public libraries** indicates that late fines disproportionately impact patrons living at a lower income level. While overdue return rates are not tied to income level, the ability to pay fees is correlated to wealth.<sup>26</sup> Although patrons from lower income families make frequent use of libraries, many are reluctant to borrow for fear of accumulating late fees.<sup>27</sup>

➤ **Many libraries cite equity as a reason for going fine free.**<sup>28</sup>

- San Francisco Library sums this concern up succinctly: “Overdue fines are a practice that negatively impacts low-income individuals by denying them exactly the service a library exists to provide. For patrons who can afford to pay, fines represent little more than a minor inconvenience.”<sup>29</sup>

### ➤ **Equity in Lawrence, KS**

Although it is difficult to make any direct cause and effect statements regarding the impact of library fines and fees on members of the community living at a lower income level, we can make a few indirect comparisons.

- **The 2016-2017 Lawrence Public Library Community Information Needs Assessment touches on Equity at LPL.**<sup>30</sup>
  - 3,178 people completed the survey. 527 or 22.7% of respondents reported annual income and household size that by 2017 Kansas Poverty Guidelines put them at the poverty line.
  - 13.1% of respondents cited library fines as a reason for not visiting more often.
  - “People living below the poverty line disproportionately cite fines as an obstacle for more frequent library use: 30.5% of people who meet Kansas poverty guidelines indicated that fines prevent them from visiting the library, while 8.6% of people living above the poverty line cite fines as a barrier.” CINA page 28-29
- **Linking library fees to poverty in the community**
  - The library does not collect demographic information on income level from our patron population. This means that it is difficult to directly tie fees owed by patrons in our database to different socioeconomic statuses. However, we can anonymously link fees owed by patrons with their addresses and do some analysis based on their location in the community.
  - To that end we looked at three measures of poverty in Lawrence:

- U.S. Census data from the American Community Survey on Poverty Status in the Last 12 Months broken down by zip code.<sup>31</sup> Individuals are considered to be in poverty by the Census Bureau if their family's total income is less than their poverty threshold. Poverty thresholds vary depending on the size and age composition of the family.
- Low income housing as identified by the Lawrence Douglas County Housing Authority (LDCHA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Low Income Housing Tax Credit. To be eligible for LDCHA housing one must have a gross annual income of less than 60% of the Douglas County median income for a family of their size.<sup>32</sup> To be eligible for housing subsidized by the HUD's LIHTC, 20-40% of the location's units must be restricted to individuals making 50-60% less than the area median income. All of the locations examined here met these conditions with 100% of their units.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the units we examined should represent the majority of low income housing in Lawrence, but not all. Tenants to Homeowners also provides subsidized units for rent or sale, LDCHA has scattered units outside of the ones analyzed here, and HUD provides housing vouchers that can be used anywhere.
- Short term housing such as the Lawrence Community Shelter, Family Promise, and other locations the library has traditionally defined as temporary and thus limited borrowing to three items at a time.<sup>34</sup> Patrons residing at any of these locations are typically experiencing homelessness.
- We looked at several basic measures to try to gain an idea if patrons from these locations were impacted by library fines and fees differently than the rest of the population. Measures examined:
  - Total fees owed by group.
  - Percent owed by group.
  - Averages owed by group.

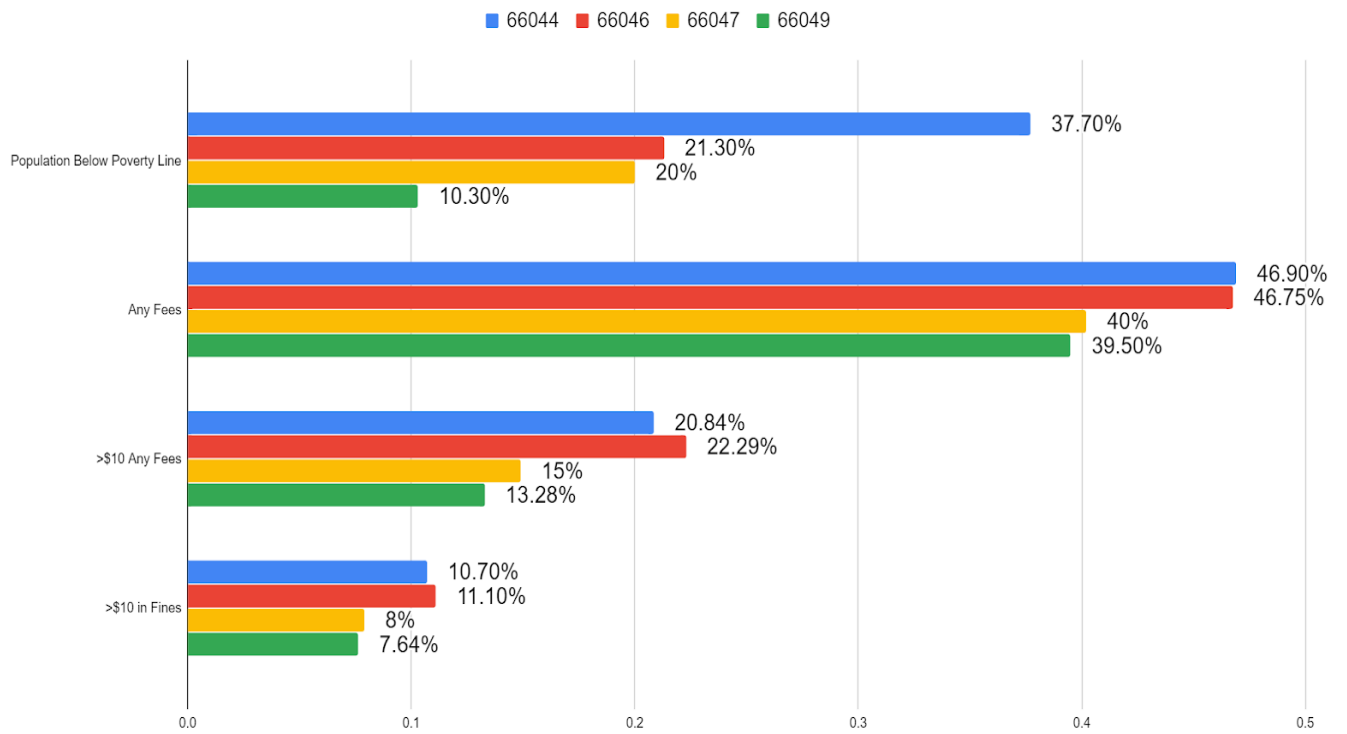
- Checkout rates by group.
- Overdue return rates by group.

○ **Poverty rates by zip code in Lawrence**

- **Comparing U.S. Census data** on poverty to numbers of patrons blocked by fines by zip code does yield an interesting correlation.
- 66044 and 66046 are ranked as having the highest percentage of the population in Lawrence falling below the poverty line.
- 66044 and 66046 also have the highest percentage of patrons that owe fees, as well as the highest percentage of patrons blocked for fees. This holds true for patrons owing at least \$10 or more, up through patrons owing \$50 or more.
- Although we can't directly link patrons that owe fees to the population living below the poverty line, it is suggestive that we see higher rates of fees in zip codes that have the highest rates of poverty.

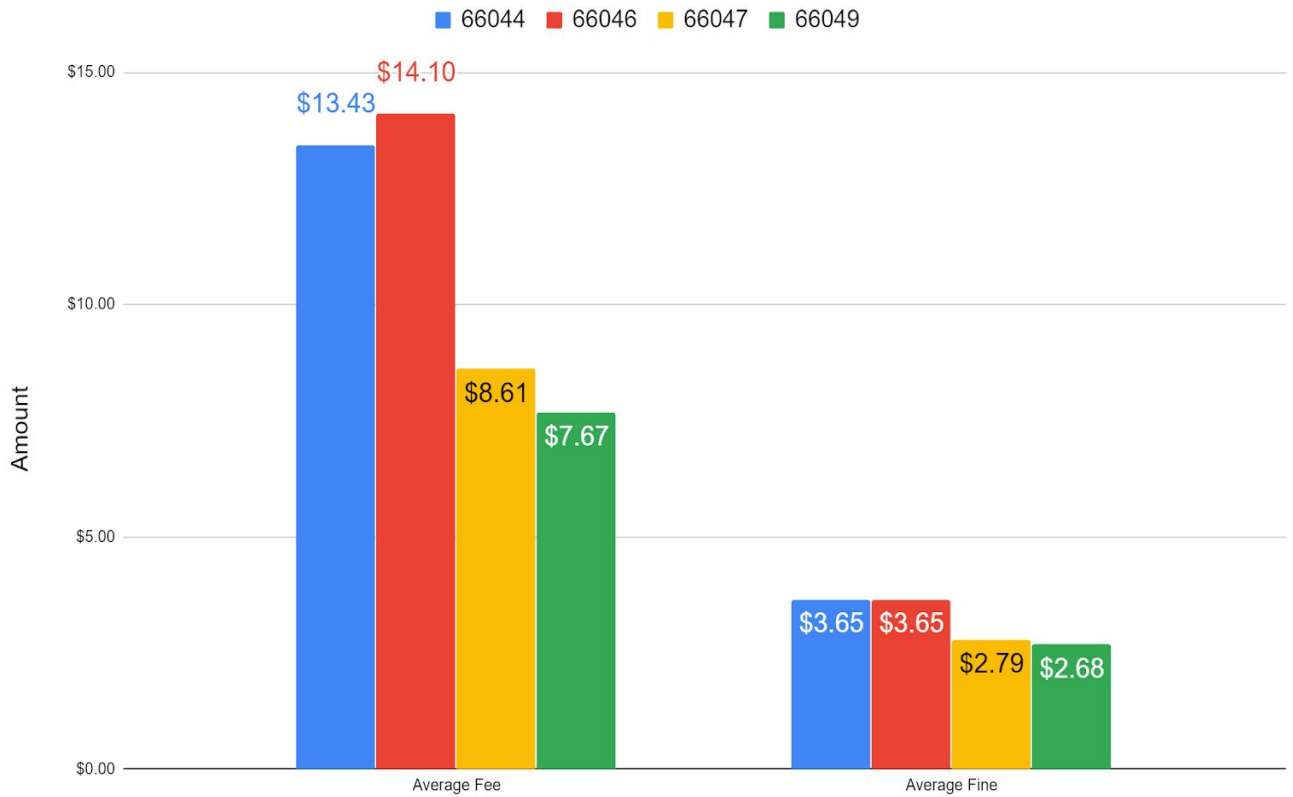
<b>Account Blocking Fines Compared with Poverty Statistics by Zip Code</b>								
	66044		66046		66047		66049	
Total Patrons registered in Zip Code	25,555		15,876		13,941		22,117	
Any Fees	11,986	46.90%	7,423	46.75%	5,606	40.20%	8,739	39.50%
>\$10 Any Fees	5,327	20.84%	3,540	22.29%	2,077	15%	2,939	13.28%
>\$10 in Fines	2,727	10.70%	1,776	11.18%	1,105	7.90%	1,652	7.64%
Total Population for whom Poverty Status is Determined POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS 2017 U.S. Census	24408		17779		20002		29795	
Total Population Below Poverty Level by Zip Code POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS 2017 U.S. Census	8223	37.70%	3779	21.30%	4005	20%	3057	10.30%

## Population Below the Poverty Line vs Fees by Zip Code



- Average total fees and fines are also highest in 66044 and 66046.

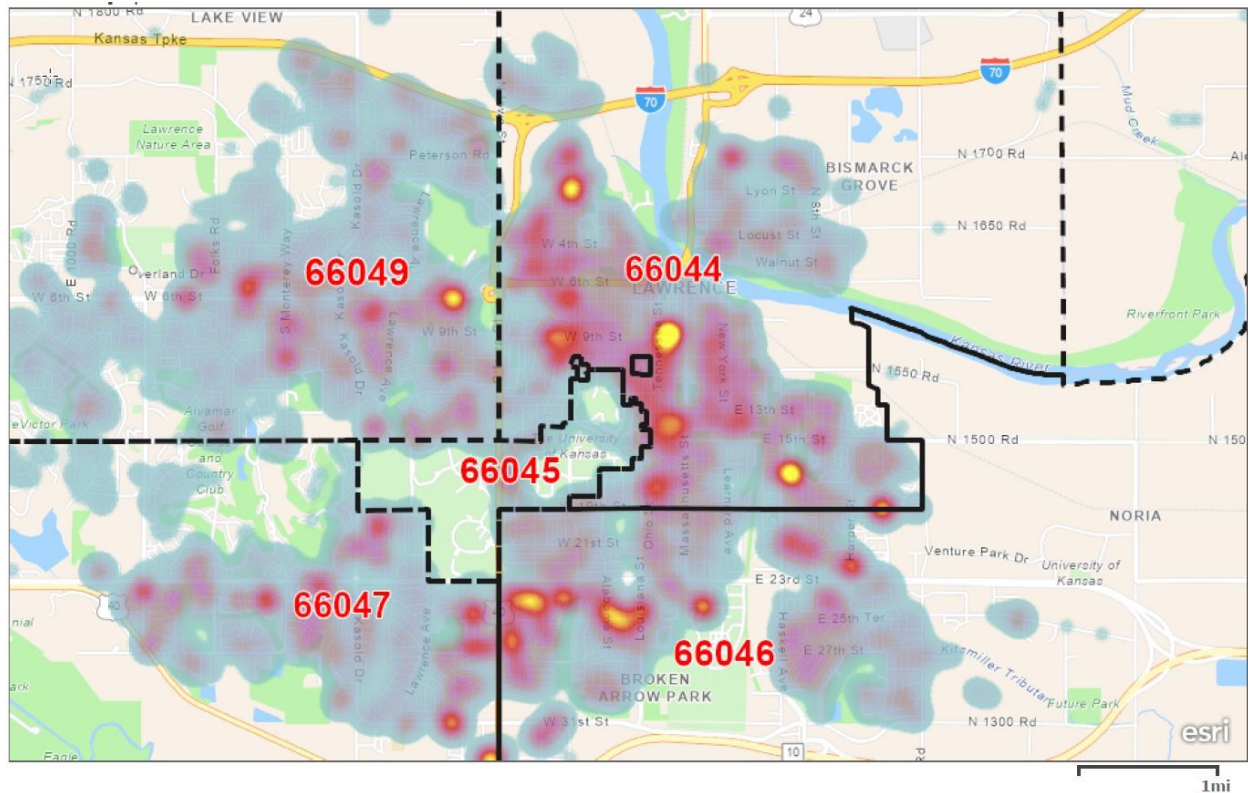
Average Fees by Zip Code



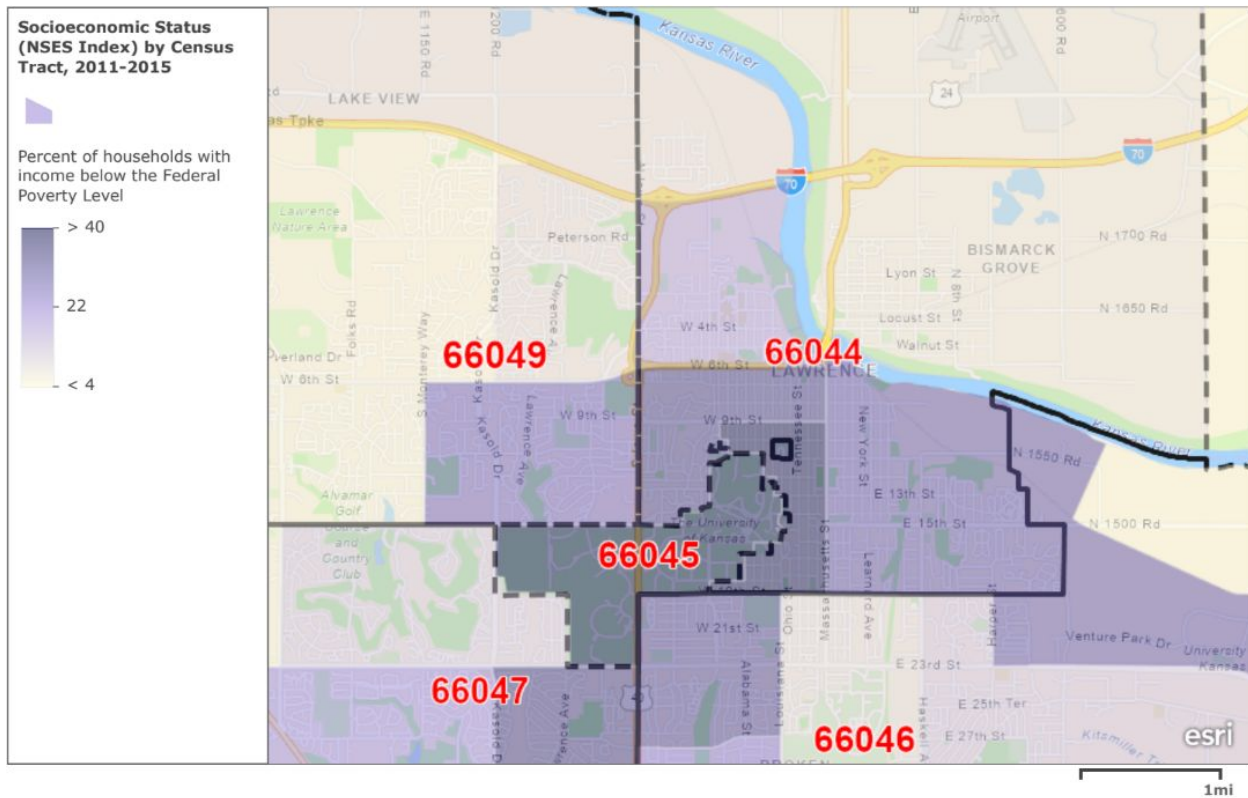


- To view this difference visually, we can map addresses with fines over \$10 by zip code. The highest concentrations do appear in 66044 and 66046.

Heat Map of Fines \$10 or More by Zip Code

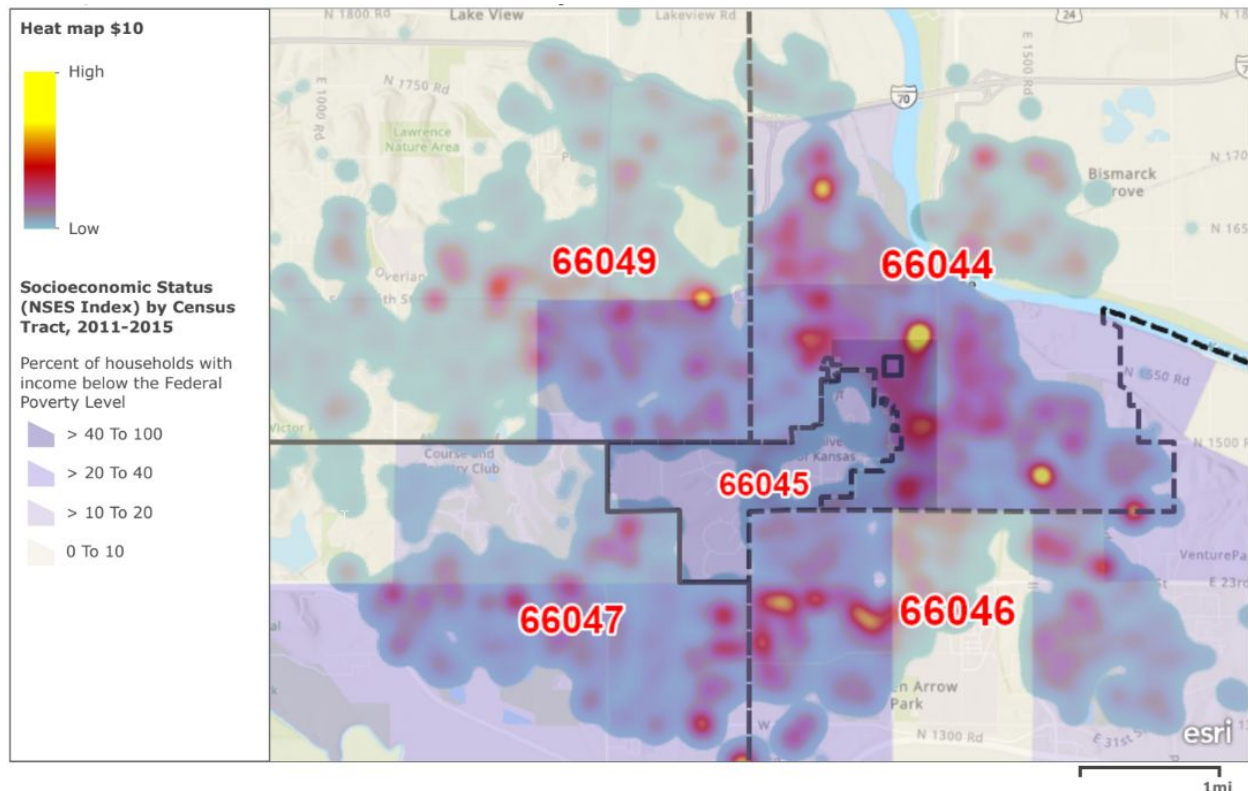


- The Socioeconomic Status (NSES Index) from the US Census Bureau's 2011-2015 American Community Survey notes percent of households with income below the Federal Poverty Line by Census Tract.<sup>35</sup>



- The same trend of higher blocking fines appearing in lower income areas holds when viewing the heat map.

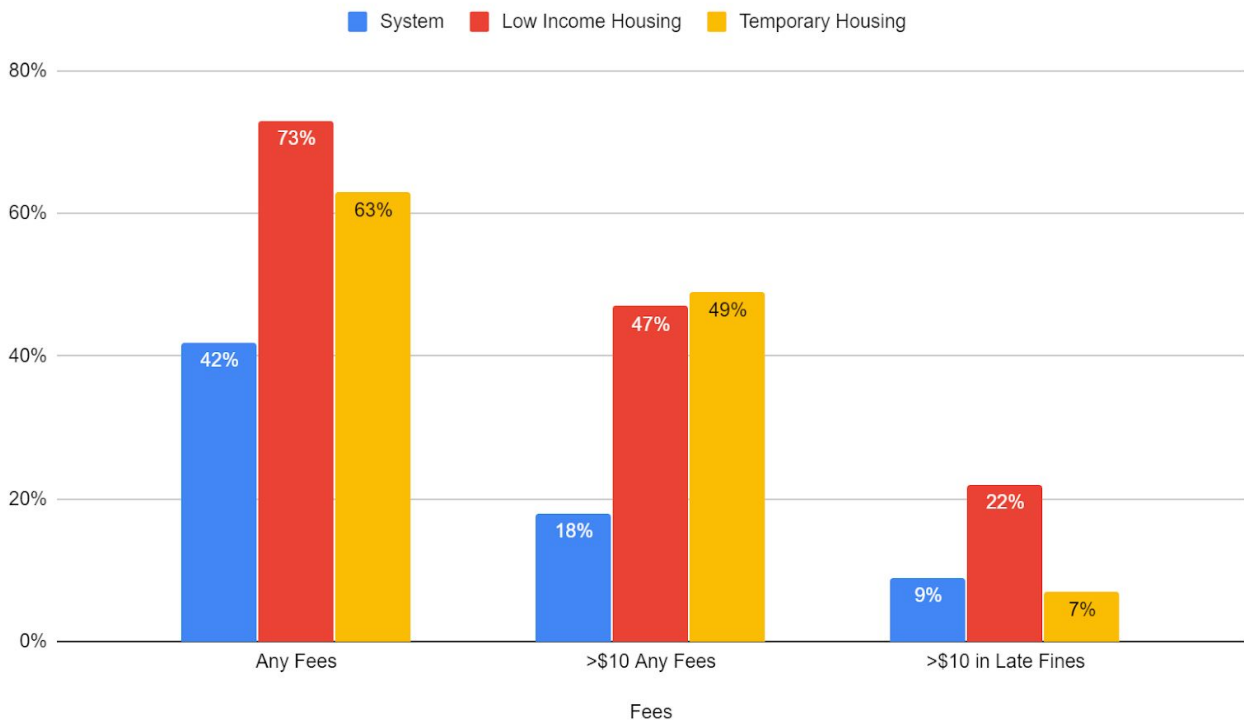
Heat Map of Fines \$10 or More by Socioeconomic Status (NSES Index) by Census Tract



- **Patrons listing low income or temporary housing**
  - Patrons living in low income or temporary housing in Lawrence have a noticeably higher percentage of total unpaid fees of any type than the rest of the Lawrence population.
  - Patrons living in low income housing also have a higher percentage of account blocking late fines than those living elsewhere.
  - Patrons living in temporary housing have a higher percent of account blocking non-late fines. Their late fees are actually

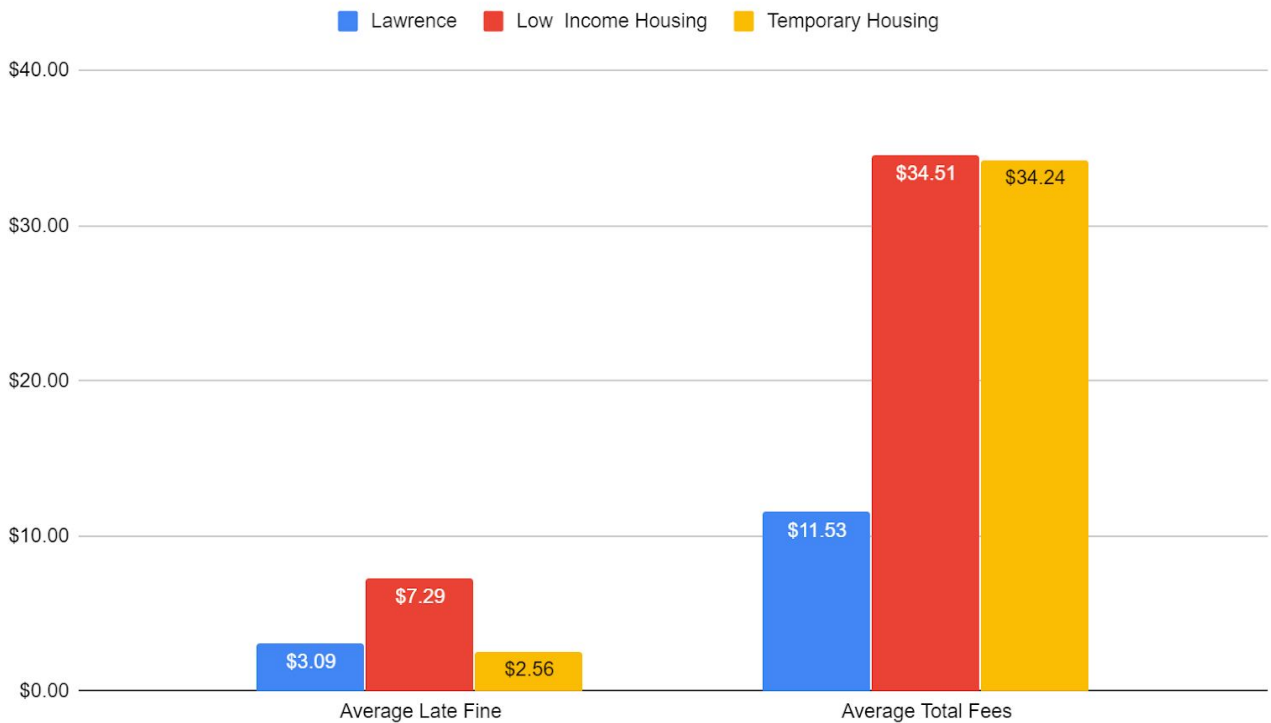
lower than the rest of the system. This is probably due to the restriction of 3 items checked out at a time versus the 50 item limit on regular accounts.

Percent Owing Fees - Lawrence vs. Low Income Housing & Temporary Housing



- The average total fees and late fines owed by patrons living in low income housing is also considerably higher than the average of the Lawrence population in general.
- The average total fees for patrons in temporary housing is much higher than the rest of Lawrence. Again, their average late fines are lower than the rest.

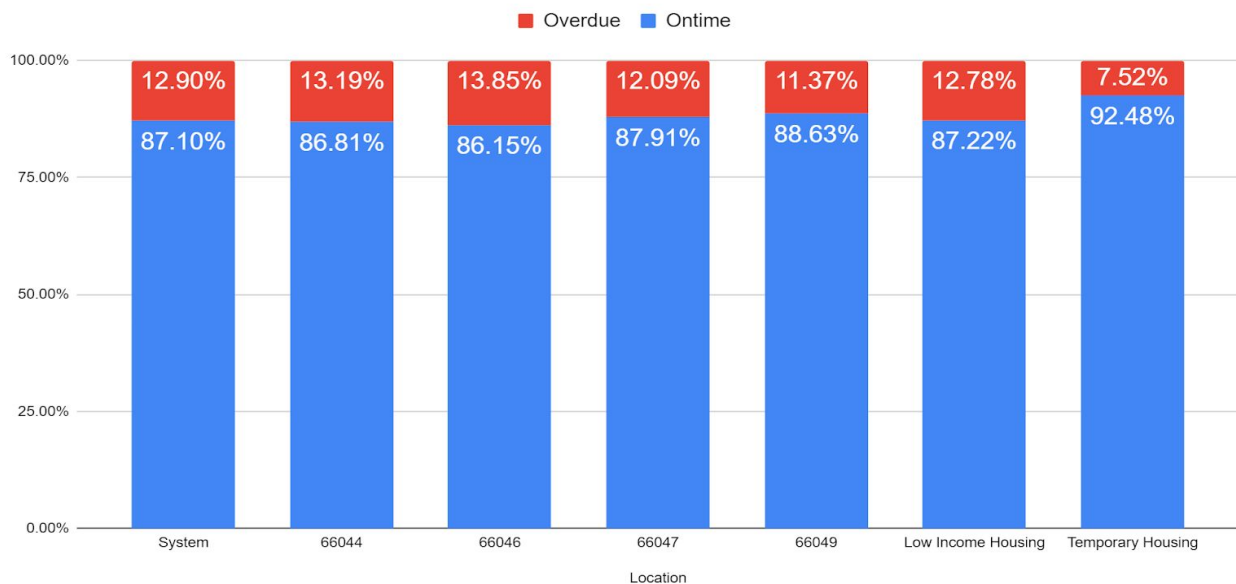
Average Fees - Lawrence vs. Low Income Housing & Temporary Housing



## On-time vs. Overdue return rates in Lawrence

- Overdue return rates are fairly consistent across the board, regardless of location. Any difference in income level would seem to have little negative effect.
- Patrons residing in temporary housing actually have a higher on time return rate than the rest of the system. This is likely due to the 3 item limit restriction on temporary accounts.

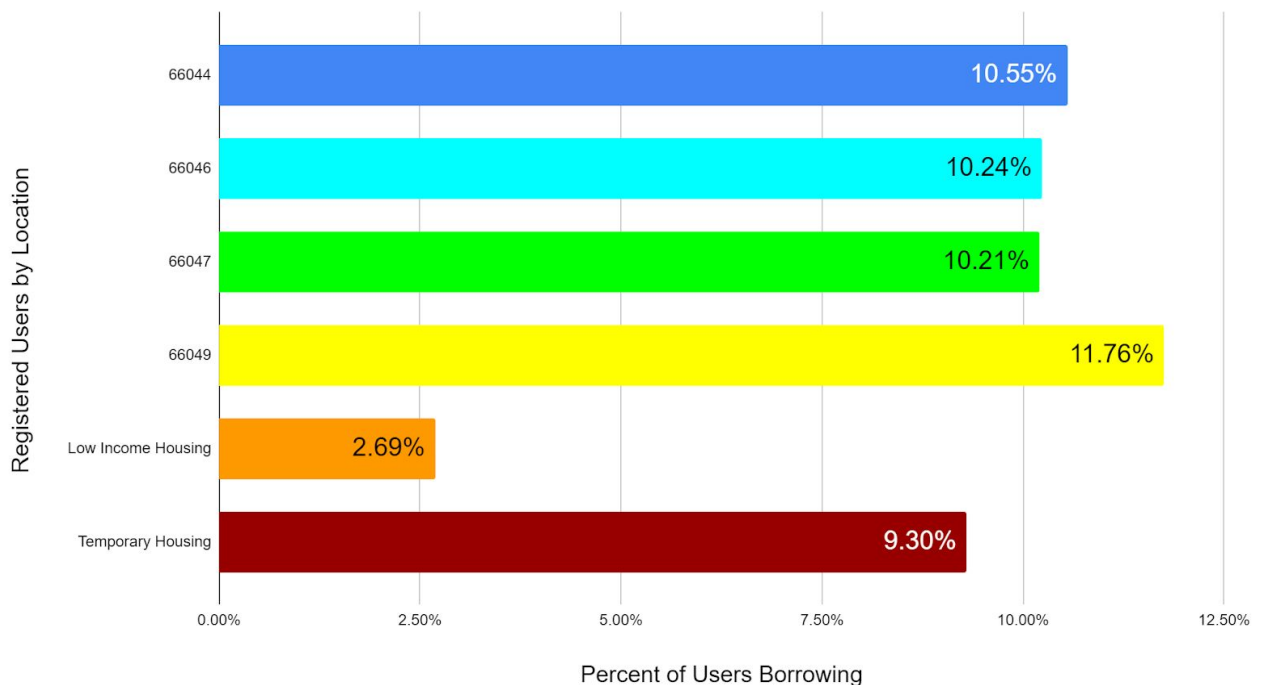
Ontime vs Overdue Rates



### Current borrowing by location

- Patrons registered in 66044 where poverty is the highest are borrowing less than patrons living in 66049 where poverty is the lowest.
- Patrons living in low income and temporary housing are borrowing less than any other area.

Current Borrowing by Location



### Blocked from access at LPL

- Of the 95,611 patrons registered in the system, 35,541, or about 37%, are impacted by late fees.
- About 18% of registered patrons are blocked for fees of any kind.
- 9% of patrons have enough late fees alone to block them.



- 31% of patrons that are blocked for fees, or 5.7% of total patrons, are blocked solely for late fees.
- Eliminating and waiving current late fees would grant 5,812 patrons immediate eligibility to borrow again. This constitutes 34% of currently blocked patrons, or 6.08% of our total patron population.

## Patrons Impacted by Fees

	# of Patrons	% of Total	% of Blocked	Amount Owed
<b>Total Registered Patrons</b>	<b>95,611</b>			
<b>Fee of any kind or amount</b>	<b>40,160</b>	<b>42.00%</b>		<b>\$1,098,489.24</b>
<b>LF any amount</b>	<b>35,541</b>	<b>37.17%</b>		<b>\$294,550.51</b>
<b>LF&lt;\$10 Only</b>	<b>22,569</b>	<b>23.61%</b>		<b>\$200,265.66</b>
<b>&gt;\$10 Any type</b>	<b>17,172</b>	<b>17.96%</b>		<b>\$1,021,401.69</b>
<b>NLF any amount</b>	<b>12,135</b>	<b>12.69%</b>		<b>\$803,938.73</b>
<b>LF &gt;\$10 + NLF any amount</b>	<b>8,688</b>	<b>9.09%</b>		<b>\$359,281.88</b>
<b>LF + NLF any amount</b>	<b>7,516</b>	<b>7.86%</b>		<b>\$565,018.16</b>
<b>LF&gt;\$10 Only</b>	<b>5,456</b>	<b>5.71%</b>	<b>31.77%</b>	<b>\$113,742.07</b>
<b>NLF&gt;\$10 Only</b>	<b>4,406</b>	<b>4.61%</b>	<b>25.66%</b>	<b>\$343,964.02</b>
<b>LF&lt;\$10 + NLF&gt;\$10 = &gt;\$10</b>	<b>3,897</b>	<b>4.08%</b>	<b>22.69%</b>	<b>\$315,722.06</b>
<b>LF&gt;\$10 + NLF&gt;\$10 = &gt;\$10</b>	<b>3,057</b>	<b>3.20%</b>	<b>17.80%</b>	<b>\$240,922.04</b>
<b>NLF&lt;\$10 Only</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>0.22%</b>		<b>\$1,378.84</b>
<b>LF&lt;\$10 + NLF&lt;\$10 = &lt;\$10</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>0.22%</b>		<b>\$1,322.56</b>
<b>LF&lt;\$10 + NLF&lt;\$10 = &gt;\$10</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>0.19%</b>	<b>1.05%</b>	<b>\$2,433.73</b>
<b>LF&gt;\$10 + NLF&lt;\$10 = &gt;\$10</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>0.18%</b>	<b>1.02%</b>	<b>\$4,617.77</b>
LF: Late Fees, NLF: Non-late fees: lost, damaged, processing, collection				
<b>Granted immediate access with waiver of LF</b>	<b>5,812</b>	<b>6.08%</b>	<b>33.85%</b>	
<b>Total patrons that benefit from waiver of LF</b>	<b>35,541</b>	<b>37.17%</b>		
<b>Blocked patrons that will benefit from waiver of LF</b>	<b>12,766</b>	<b>13.35%</b>	<b>74.34%</b>	



# How would we do it?

With fine elimination we would seek to find a balance between individual access and widespread availability of materials.

What does our **current notification** and **lost billing schedule** look like?

## Key points:

### ➤ Late fees

- Late fees of \$0.15 per day per item are charged starting the day after the due date.
- Accumulating late fees are immediately held against the patron's ability to borrow.
- \$10 or more in fees block from access.
- Late fees max at \$4.50 per item at 30 days late.

### ➤ Replacement costs

- At 30 days, overdue late fees for an unreturned item are swapped for replacement and processing fees.
- Replacement and processing are swapped back to \$4.50 in late fees if item is returned.

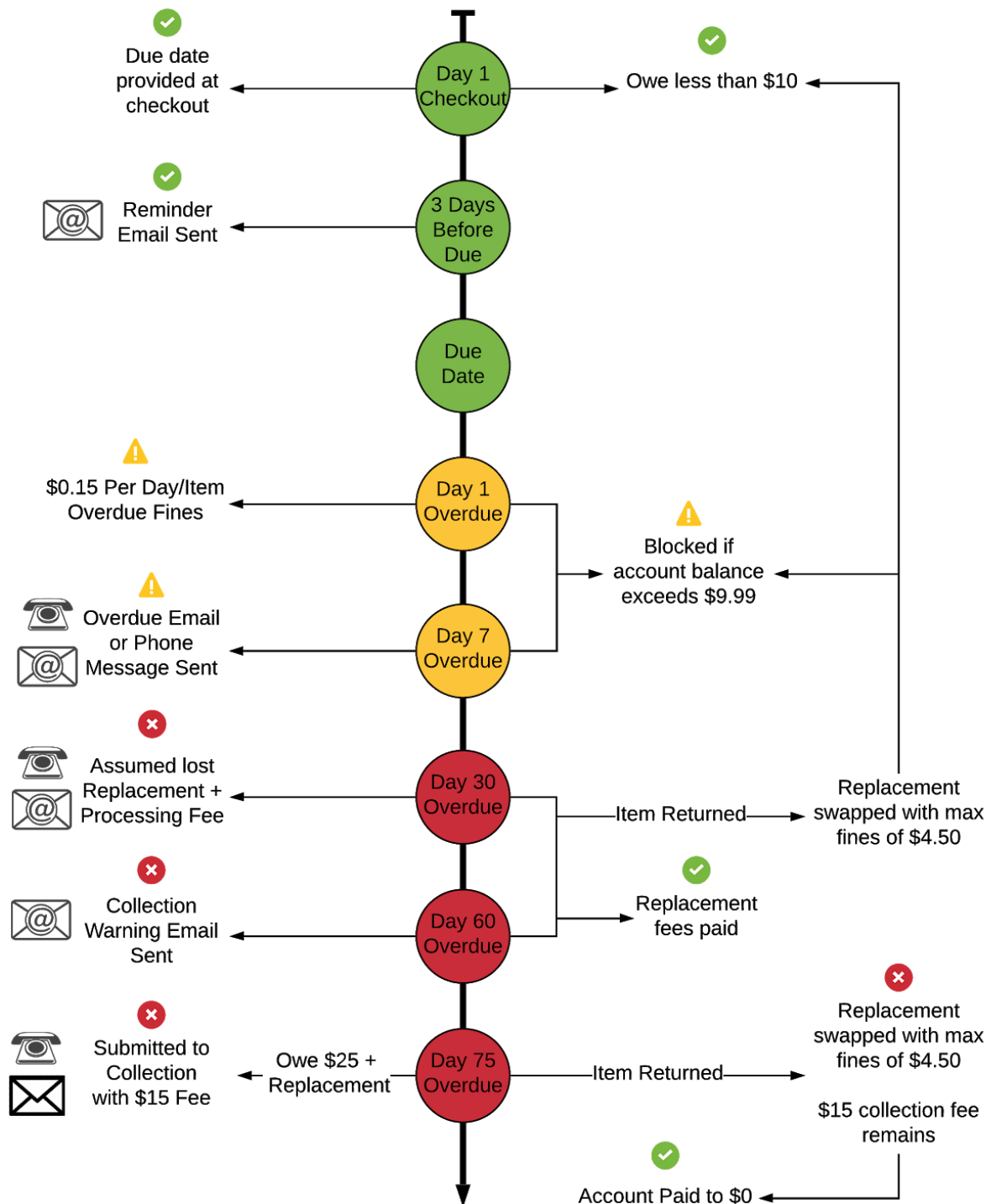
### ➤ Collection Agency

- 45 days after billing (75 days late), accounts with \$25 or more in replacement fees are automatically referred to collection. A non-refundable \$15 charge is applied.
- Accounts in collection must be paid to \$0 to borrow again.

## Notice Summary:

1. Courtesy email 3 days before the due date.
2. Email or phone call 7 days after the due date.
3. Email or phone call 30 days after the due date (bill).
4. Email 60 days after the due date (15 days before collection).
5. Letters and phone calls 75 days after the due date by collection agency.

# Current Process



## **Post fines notification and lost billing schedule**

### **Key Points and changes:**

#### **➤ Late Fines**

- No late fees of any kind will be charged or collected.

#### **➤ Auto-renewal**

- Items will be auto-renewed 3 days before they are due if they are eligible for renewal. An email notice will be sent out reporting the success or failure of the auto-renewal.

#### **➤ Overdue hold email**

- A new email notice for overdue items will be sent only for overdue items that have holds. The language in this message will be tailored to indicate that others are waiting.

#### **➤ Blocked without fees**

- Accounts with items 15 days late are blocked without fees. Return of these items will automatically reopen the account for borrowing.

#### **➤ Replacement Costs**

- Items are billed for replacement at 30 days overdue.
- Replacement and processing are waived if item is returned.

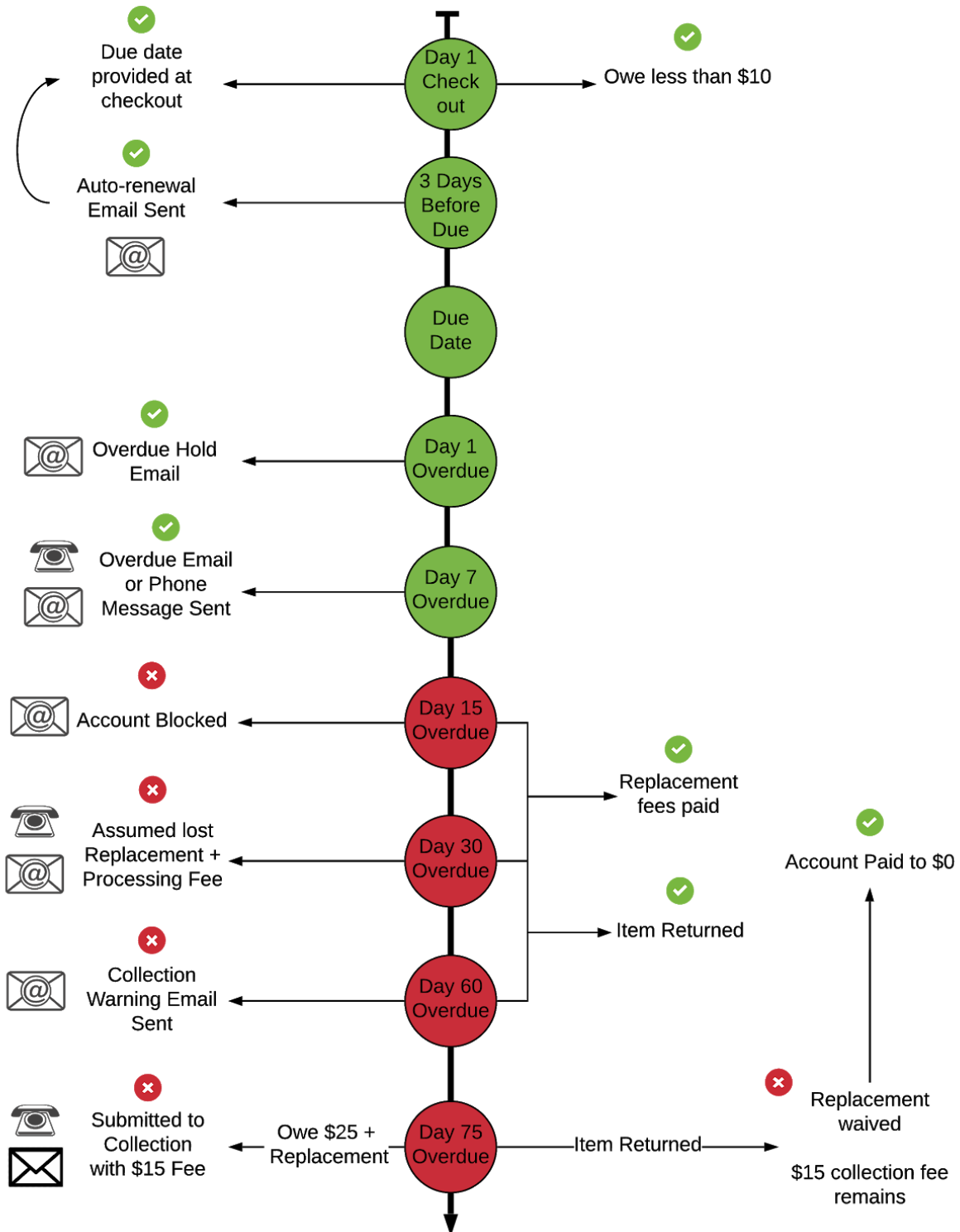
#### **➤ Collection Agency**

- 45 days after billing (75 days late), accounts with \$25 or more in replacement fees are automatically referred to collection. A non-refundable \$15 charge is applied.
- Accounts in collection must be paid to \$0 to borrow again.

### **Notice Summary:**

1. Email 3 days before the due date alerting to success or failure of auto-renewal.
2. Email 1 day after the due date for items with holds.
3. Email or phone call 7 days after the due date.
4. Email or phone call 30 days after the due date (bill).
5. Email 60 days after the due date (15 days before collection).
6. Letters and phone calls 75 days after due date by collection agency.

# Fine Free Process



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# What happens if we do it?

What can we predict about the impact of going fine free?

1. **Costs**
2. **Overdue returns**
3. **Circulation**
4. **Holds and ordering**
5. **Access**
6. **Support for the library**

## **Costs**

- If we eliminate late fines, we will have to make up around 2.6%, or around \$120,000, of our revenue elsewhere.
- If we eliminate late fines, we can seriously consider the elimination of fee payment at the self checks and through the website. This will include eliminating costs associated with the equipment and services. Service fees for credit card transactions will also be reduced for payments taken at the Accounts desk, as there are far fewer transactions for lost and damaged items.
- Some libraries do report an increased return of lost materials as patrons realize they won't be penalized for the late return. This could potentially translate into a reduction of expenses on ordering replacement items. One library in our survey reported this as being the case.
- A major source of friction between staff and patrons will be removed.

## **Overdue returns**

- Research indicates that we may experience a short term increase in overdues but should expect a lower long term overdue rate. Most of the respondents in our survey reported no change in overdue rates. Adding

auto-renewal into the mix will likely result in little change in overall overdues.

### **Circulation**

- We can expect some probable increase from return of patrons formerly blocked or afraid of fines.
- Auto-renewal will by default bump our circulation stats up. It is possible to separate out renewal stats from first time checkout stats.
- As noted before some libraries report an overall increase in circulation after this change. Our survey showed the same result.

### **Holds and ordering**

- As noted before, one practical concern we had about eliminating fines was the potential increase in hold queue wait time and/or a need for increased spending to purchase additional copies to fill holds.
- Again, other libraries and respondents to our own survey report no change in this area.
- We will monitor this but expect no serious change.

### **Access**

- 35,541 registered patrons would benefit from eliminating and waiving late fees.
- 12,766 currently blocked patrons would be closer to regaining access, while 5,812 would immediately be eligible to borrow again.

### **Support for the library**

- Fine elimination is universally reported as increasing positive perceptions of the library and improves relations between staff and patrons.
- From our survey a library in Colorado reports, “In my personal opinion, all libraries should have eliminated fines years ago. It has been one of the best investments our library could have made in improving the customer

experience. It has also been a great benefit to staff morale, because they no longer have to have difficult conversations with customers over 25 cents in overdue fines. These two things far outweigh any other numeric benefits you see from removing fines as a barrier to access.” Several others expressed the wish that they had made the change sooner.<sup>36</sup>

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## Conclusion

The traditional reasons for charging late fines do not adequately justify their use. Research does not support the idea that they ensure on time return of materials. Although we do raise revenue with fines, the American Library Association and our own Values strongly suggest we should find other ways of funding. Encouraging responsibility in the community is important, but far outweighed by our primary mission of ensuring access. Furthermore, late fines are inequitable, impacting most those who can afford them the least.

With the elimination of late fines, the library will incentivize the timely return of materials by temporarily blocking access based on a reasonable schedule. Patrons will continue to be held accountable for lost and damaged items. With a combination of auto-renewals and an adjusted notice schedule, we will seek to balance individual access with widespread availability of materials.

Based on research, we can reasonably expect a positive outcome. Although revenue traditionally obtained through late fines will need to be made up elsewhere, we can expect reduced costs in technology and staff time. Long term overdue returns will likely not increase, while an overall increase in circulation may occur. There will absolutely be an increase in patron access. Support from our already supportive community will almost certainly increase.

We believe that a great community deserves a great library. This is a great library largely because of the love and support it has received from the community. Let us return that love and support, and imagine more.

# Endnotes

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List of some libraries reporting no long term change in overdue returns:

- Addison Public Library - Illinois
- Alameda County Library - California
- Algonquin Public Library - Illinois
- American School Library - Brazil
- Amos Memorial Library - Ohio
- Columbus Metropolitan Library - Ohio
- Daniel Boone Regional Library - Missouri
- Dayton Metro Library - Ohio
- Dedham Public Library - Mass
- Dubuque Public Library - Iowa
- Ela Area Public Library - Illinois
- Enoch Pratt Library - Maryland
- Floyd Memorial Library - New York
- Gleason Public Library - Mass.
- Milton Public Library - Vermont
- Salt Lake Public Library - Utah
- Vernon Area Public Library - Illinois
- Vigo County Library - Indiana
- Anythink Libraries - Colorado
- Sheldon Public Library - Iowa
- Berkeley Public Library - California
- Saint Paul Public Library - Minn.
- Nashville Public Library - Tennessee

Imagine! Libraries - Montana  
Arapahoe Library District - Colorado  
Meridian Library District - Idaho  
Eagle Mountain Public Library - Utah  
Oak Park Public Library - Illinois  
Harrison Memorial Library - California  
Hays Public Library - Kansas  
Harrison County Public Library - Indiana  
Canastota Public Library - New York  
Mesquite Public Library - Texas  
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List of some libraries reporting no impact on holds and ordering:

Algonquin Area Public Library District - Illinois  
Berkeley Public Library - California  
City of Saint Paul Public Library - Minnesota  
Denver Public Library - Colorado  
Ela Area Public Library District - Illinois  
Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library - Indiana  
Gleason Public Library - Mass  
Nashville Public Library - Tennessee  
Oak Park Public Library - Illinois  
Salt Lake Public Library -Utah  
San Diego Public Library - California  
San Jose Public Library - California  
San Rafael Public Library - California  
Vernon Area Public Library District - Illinois  
Joplin Public - Missouri  
Anythink Libraries - Colorado  
Contra Costa County Library - California

Sheldon Public Library - Iowa  
 Berkeley Public Library - California  
 Dayton Metro Library - Ohio  
 Denver Public Library - Colorado  
 Saint Paul Public Library - Minnesota  
 Nashville Public Library - Tennessee  
 Fargo Public Library - North Dakota  
 Imagine!F Libraries - Montana  
 Arapahoe Library District - Colorado  
 Meridian Library District - Idaho  
 Eagle Mountain Public Library - Utah  
 Oak Park Public Library - Illinois  
 Fort Scott Public Library - Kansas  
 Bangor Public Library - Maine  
 Hays Public Library - Kansas  
 Awen Cultural Trust - United Kingdom  
 Jervis Public Library - New York  
 Hamilton Public Library - New York  
 Middleville Free Library - New York  
 Harrison County Public Library - Indiana  
 Canastota Public Library - New York  
 Abington Public Library - Mass.  
 Casey Cardinia Libraries - Australia  
 Ventress Memorial Library - Mass.  
 Morrisville Public Library - New York  
 Thomas Crane Public Library - Mass.

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List of some libraries reporting steady or increased circulation:

Alameda County Library - California  
C. E. Weldon Public Library - Tennessee  
Enoch Pratt Library - Maryland  
High Plains Library District - Colorado  
Salt Lake Public Library - Utah  
San Rafael Public Library - California  
Stark County Library District - Ohio  
Vancouver Island University - Canada  
Vigo County Library - Indiana  
Contra Costa County Library - California  
Sheldon Public Library - Iowa  
Saint Paul Public Library - Minnesota  
Nashville Public Library - Tennessee  
Fargo Public Library - North Dakota  
Arapahoe Library District - Colorado  
Meridian Library District - Idaho  
Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library - Indiana  
Eagle Mountain Public Library - Utah  
Oak Park Public Library - Illinois  
Harrison Memorial Library - California  
Burlingame Public Library - California  
Fort Scott Public Library - Kansas  
Bangor Public Library - Maine  
Hays Public Library - Kansas  
Awen Cultural Trust - United Kingdom  
Jervis Public Library - New York  
Hamilton Public Library - New York  
Middleville Free Library - New York  
Harrison County Public Library - Indiana  
Canastota Public Library - New York  
Dunham Public Library - New York  
Abington Public Library - Mass.  
Casey Cardinia Libraries - Australia  
Morrisville Public Library - New York  
Libraries Tasmania - Tasmania

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List of some libraries reporting cost to collect was greater than what they took in:

- Andover Public Library - Kansas
- Brigham Young University - Utah
- Coalinga District Library - California
- Dakota County Library - Michigan
- Daniel Boone Regional Library - Missouri
- Dedham Public Library - Mass.
- Douglas County Library - Oregon
- Dover Town Library - Mass
- Gleason Public Library - Illinois
- Salt Lake Public Library - Utah
- San Diego Public Library - California

Vernon Area Public Library - Illinois

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List of some libraries reporting improved customer experience:

- Alameda County Library System - California
- Berkeley Public Library - California
- City of Saint Paul Public Library - Minnesota
- Dayton Metro Library - Ohio
- Dedham Public Library - Mass
- Denver Public Library - Colorado
- Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library - Indiana
- Floyd Memorial Library - New York
- Gleason Public Library - Mass
- Nashville Public Library - Tennessee
- Oak Park Public Library - Illinois
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Library - New York
- Rowley Free Public Library - Mass
- Salt Lake County Public Library -Utah
- San Diego Public Library - California
- San Jose Public Library - California
- Vancouver Island University library - Canada
- Vernon Area Public Library - Illinois

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