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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:

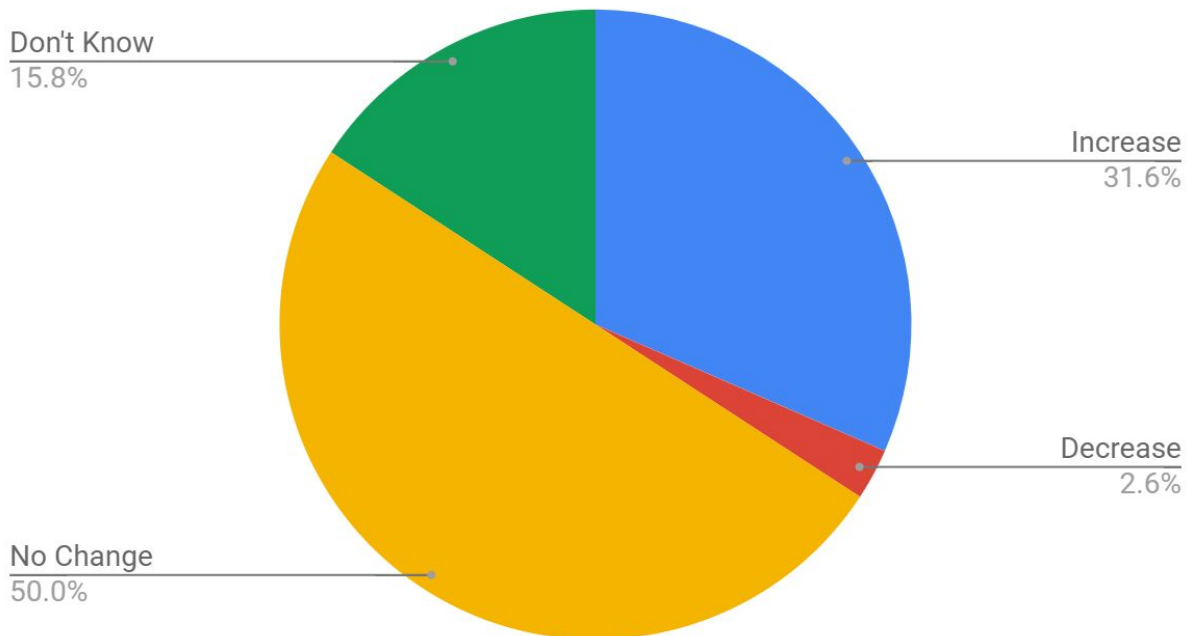
1. Overdue rates are not substantially impacted by late fines.
2. Hold queues and ordering are not hurt when a library goes fine free.
3. Overall circulation rates tend to remain steady or increase with fine removal.

**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>

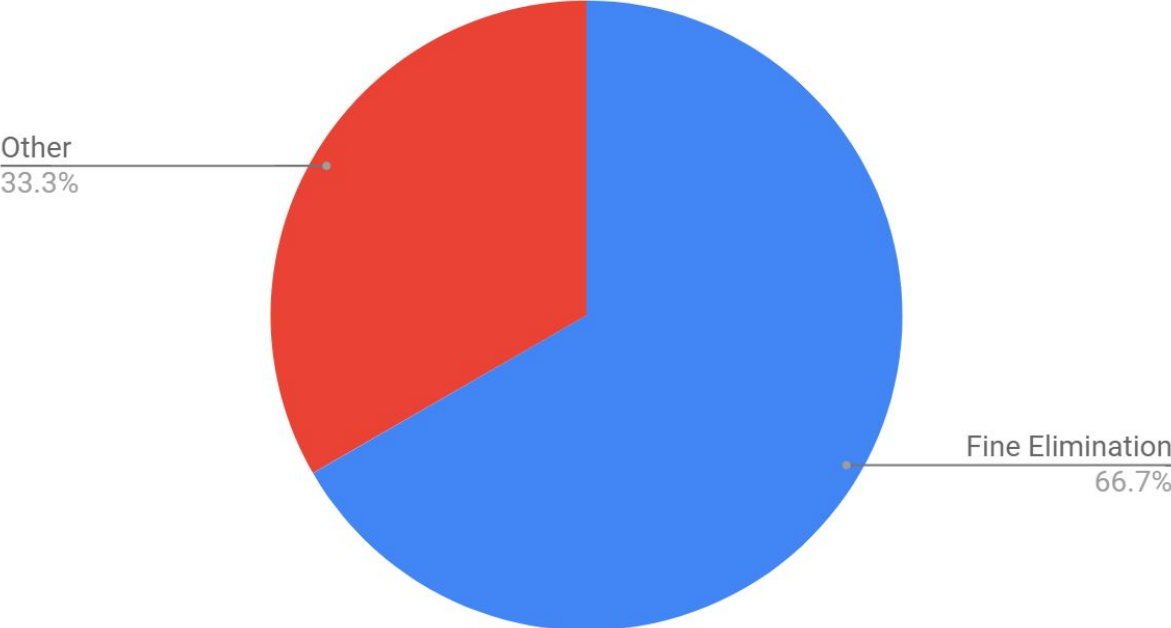
- In some cases, fine elimination seems to cause an increase in short term overdue rates but a decrease in long term overdue rates. More late items ultimately come back.<sup>10</sup> In the weeks since eliminating fines Chicago Public Library reports a 240% increase in the return of long overdue items.<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?



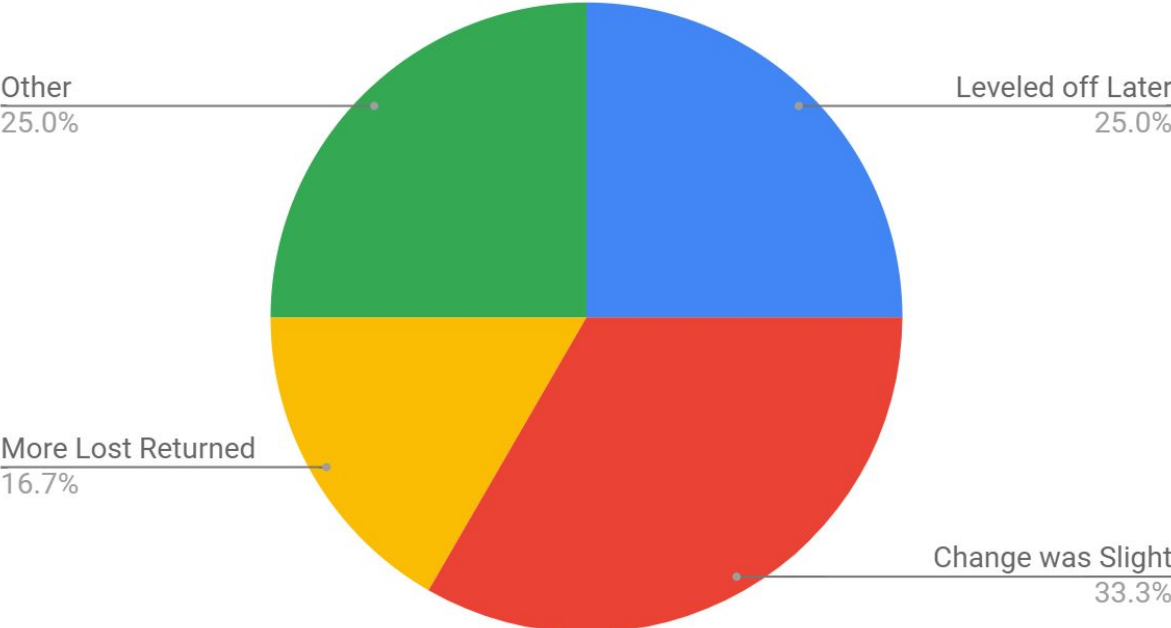
- Most saw no change or a decrease in overdue rates.

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%
		<b>865,952</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>857,467</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>1,723,419</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
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%
		<b>12,889</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>12,899</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>25,788</b>	<b>100.00%</b>