

**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: