

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.**²²

- 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.**²³

- 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.*”²⁴
- 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.*”²⁵

➤ **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.²⁶ Although patrons from lower income families make frequent use of libraries, many are reluctant to borrow for fear of accumulating late fees.²⁷

➤ **Many libraries cite equity as a reason for going fine free.**²⁸

- 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.”²⁹

➤ **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.

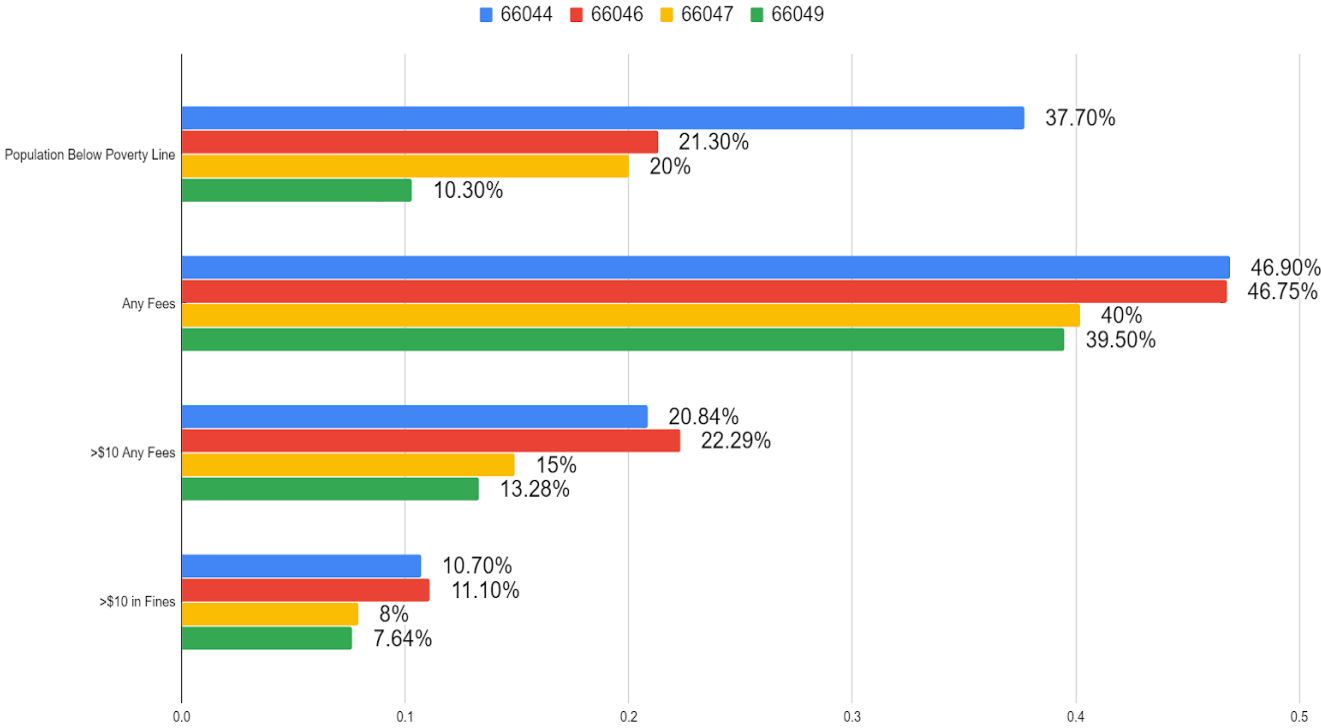
- **The 2016-2017 Lawrence Public Library Community Information Needs Assessment touches on Equity at LPL.**³⁰
 - 3,178 people completed the survey. 527 or 22.7% of respondents reported annual income and household size that by 2017 Kansas Poverty Guidelines put them at the poverty line.
 - 13.1% of respondents 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.³¹ 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.³² 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.

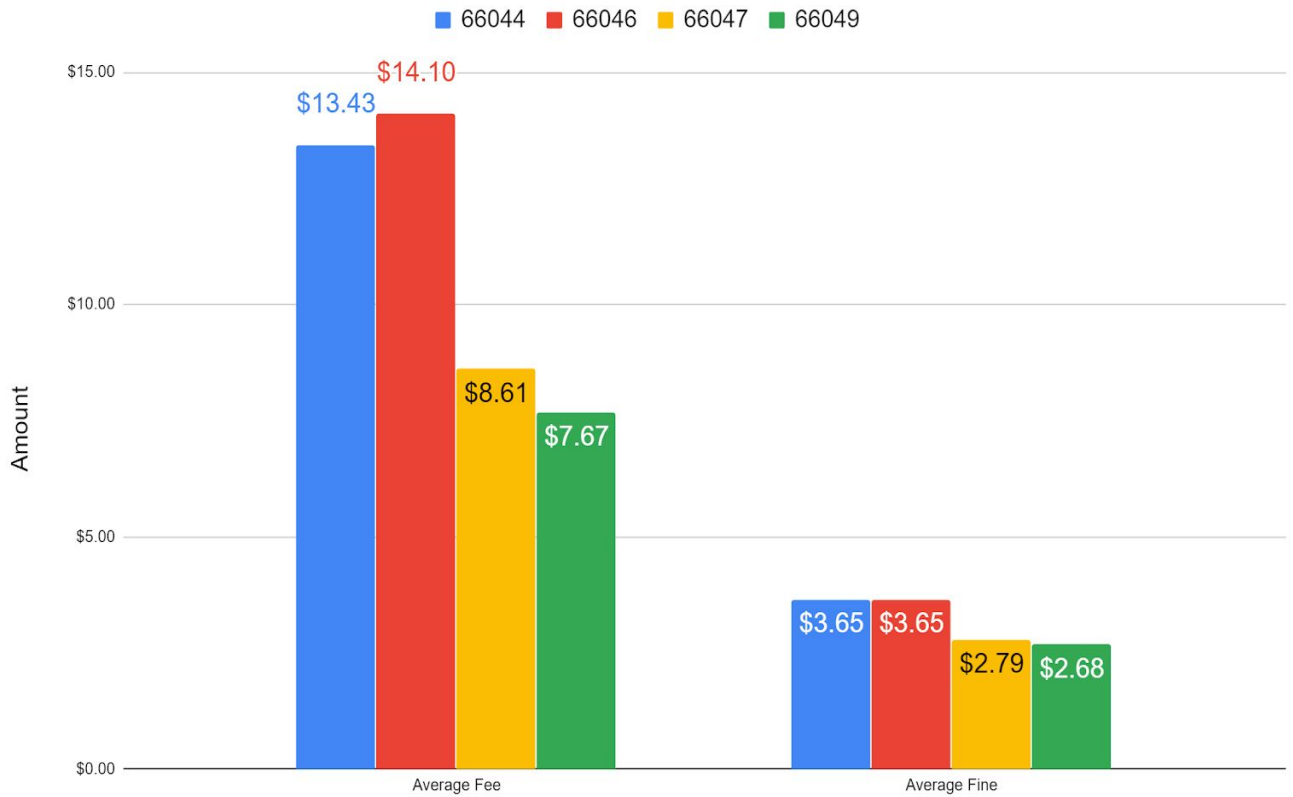
Account Blocking Fines Compared with Poverty Statistics by Zip Code								
	66044		66046		66047		66049	
Total Patrons registered in Zip Code	25,555		15,876		13,941		22,117	
Any Fees	11,986	46.90%	7,423	46.75%	5,606	40.20%	8,739	39.50%
>\$10 Any Fees	5,327	20.84%	3,540	22.29%	2,077	15%	2,939	13.28%
>\$10 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



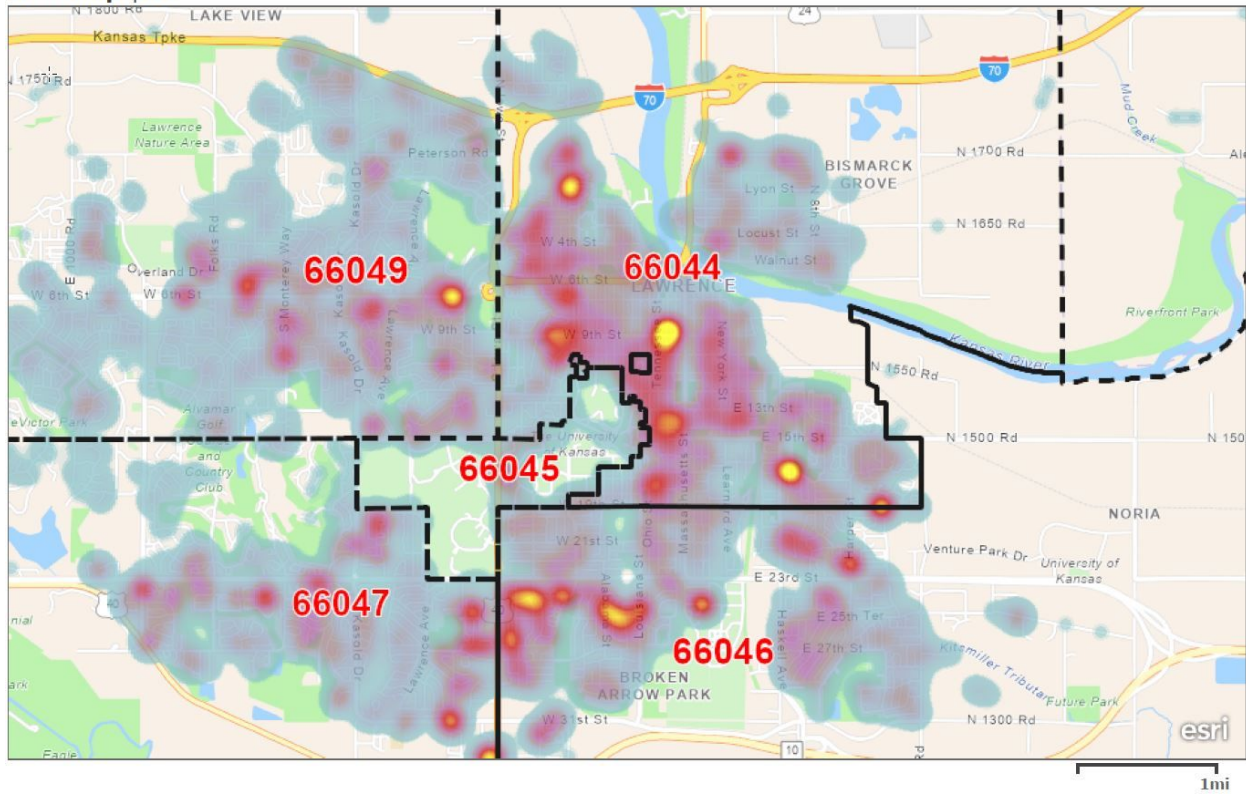
- Average total fees and fines are also highest in 66044 and 66046.

Average Fees by Zip Code

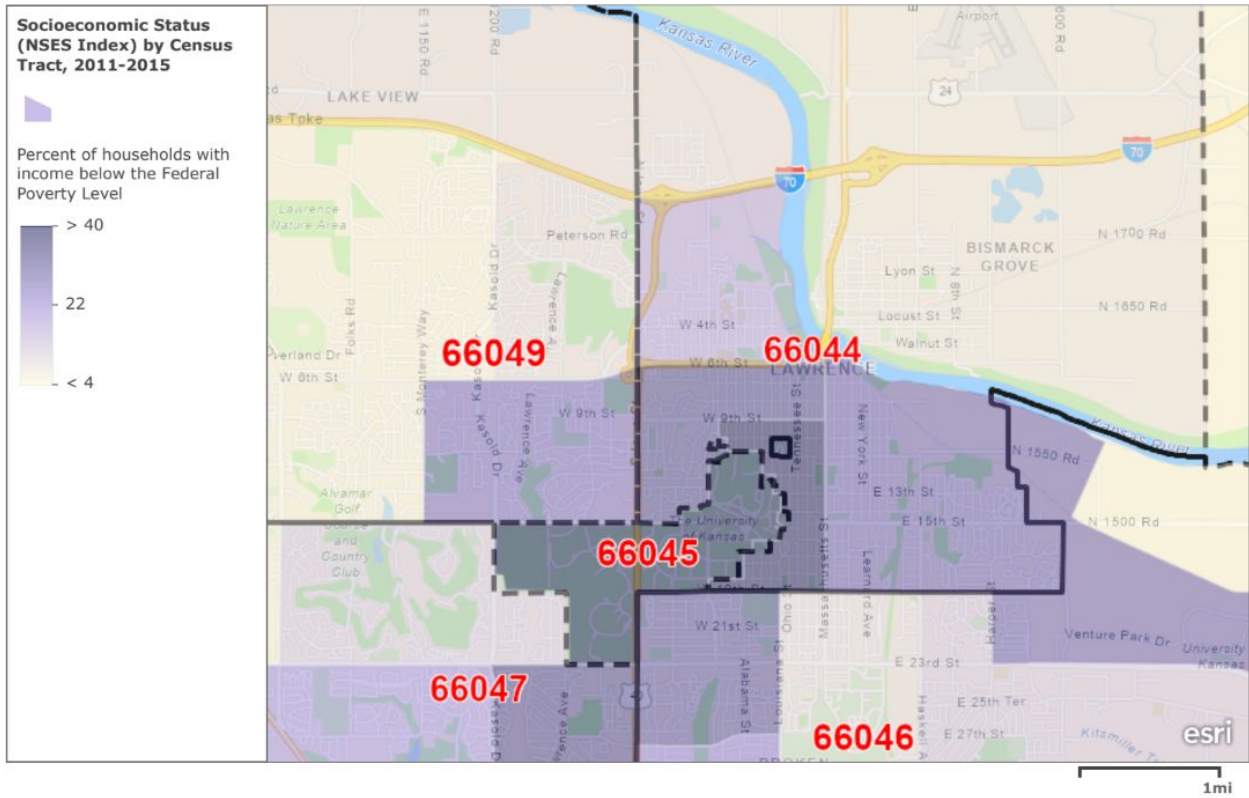


- To view this difference visually, we can map addresses with fines over \$10 by zip code. The highest concentrations do appear in 66044 and 66046.

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

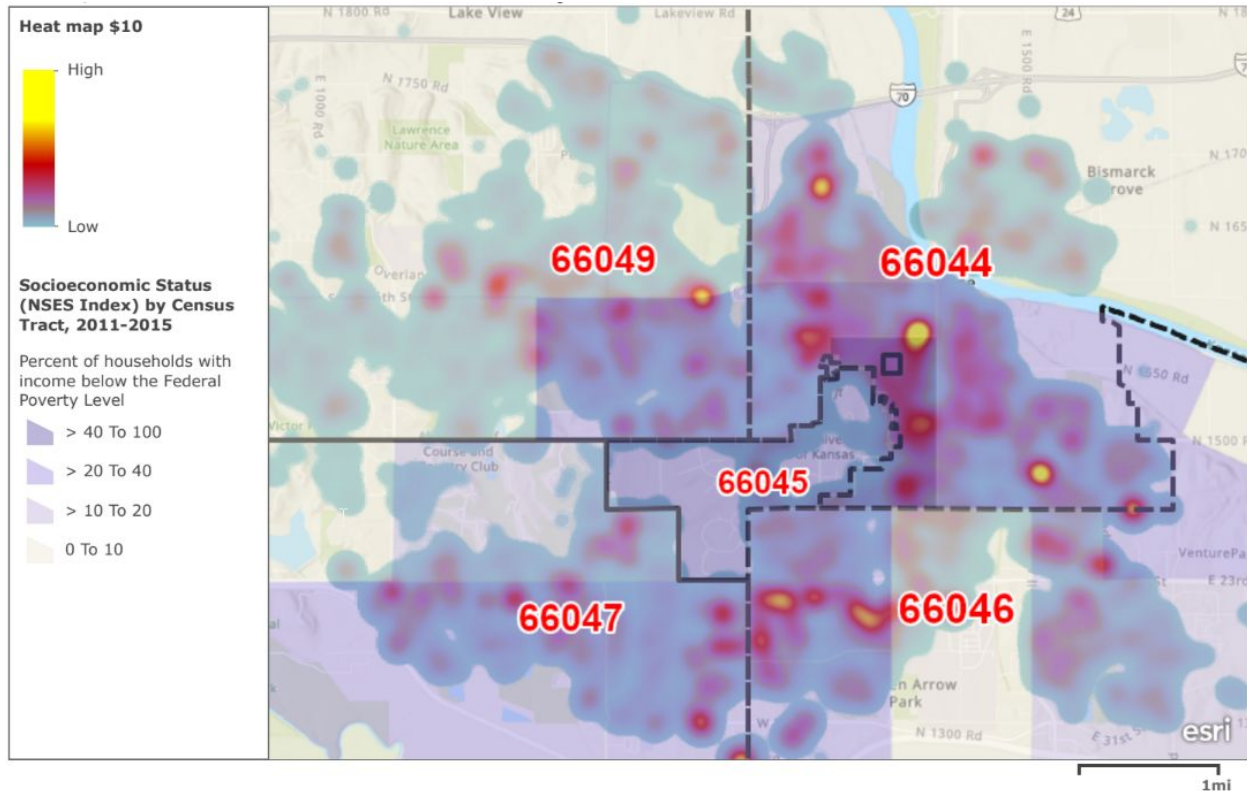


- The Socioeconomic Status (NSES Index) from the US Census Bureau's 2011-2015 American Community Survey notes percent of households with income below the Federal Poverty Line by Census Tract.³⁵



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

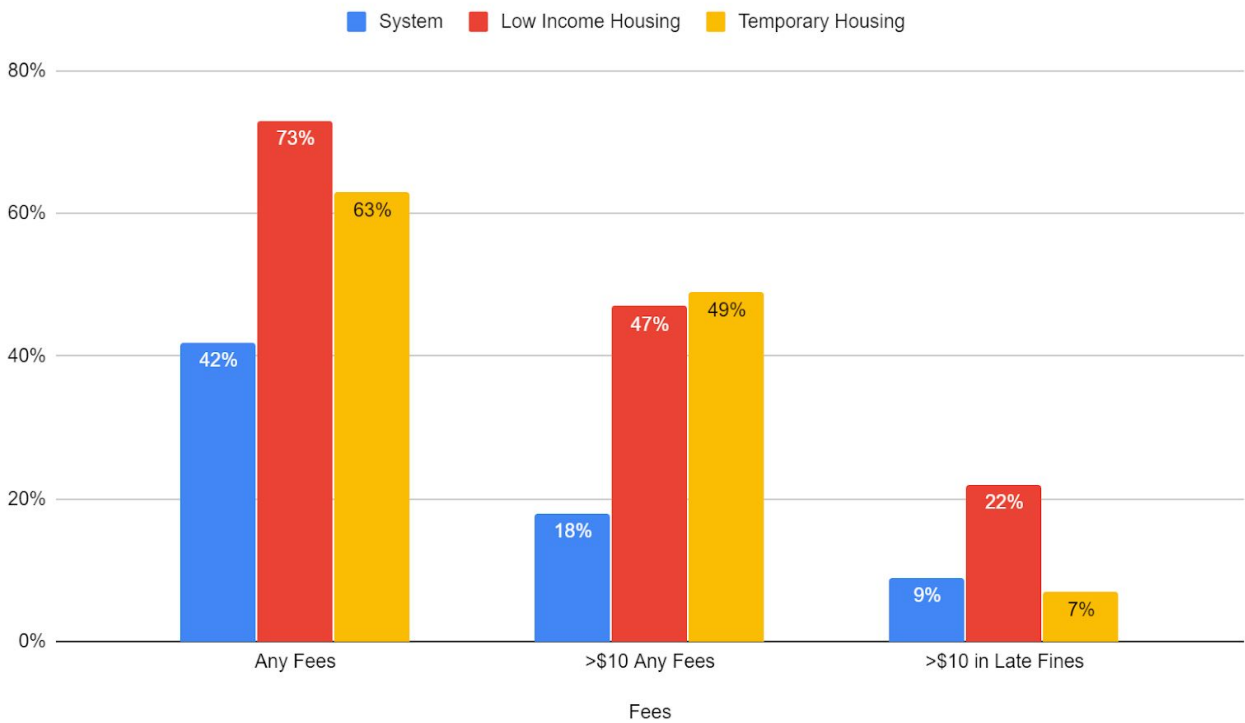
Heat Map of Fines \$10 or More by Socioeconomic Status (NSES Index) by Census Tract



- **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

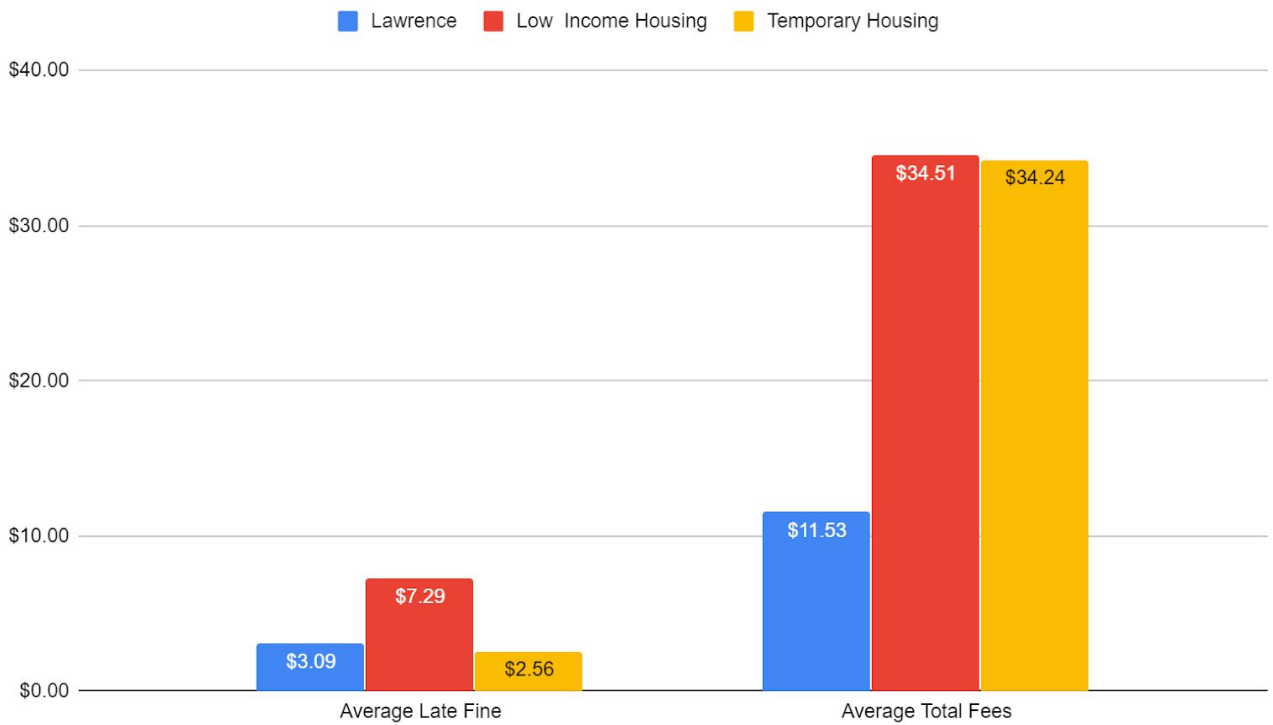
lower than the rest of the system. This is probably due to the restriction of 3 items checked out at a time versus the 50 item limit on regular accounts.

Percent Owning 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.

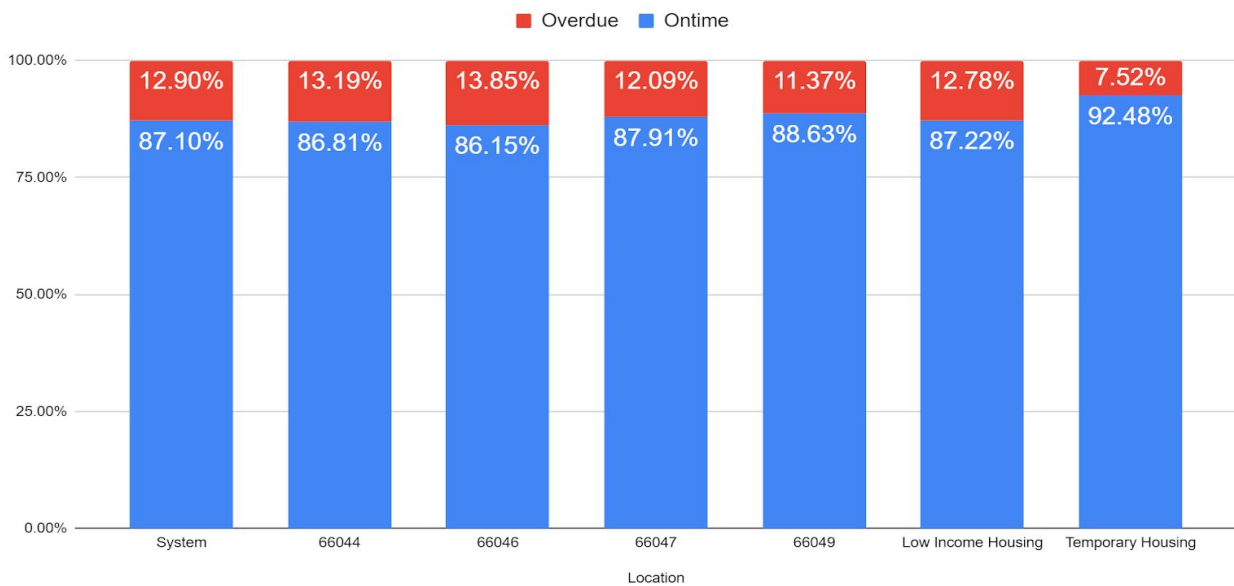
Average Fees - Lawrence vs. Low Income Housing & Temporary Housing



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.

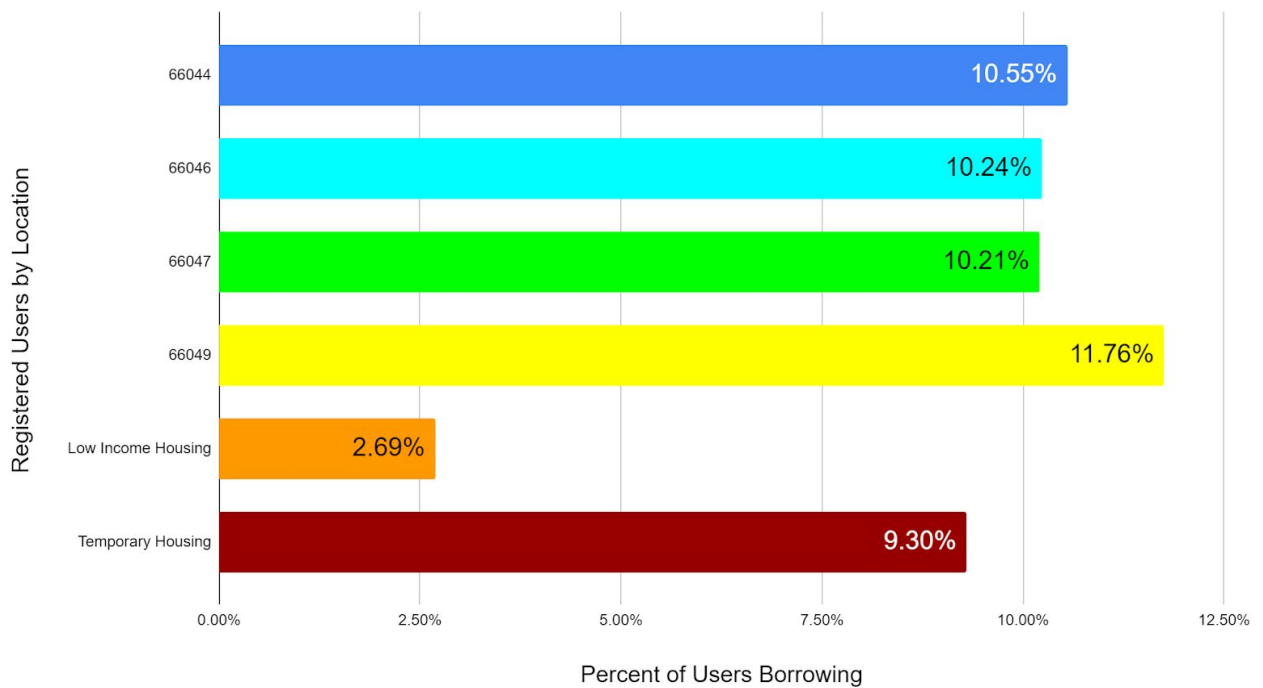
Ontime vs Overdue Rates



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