

Resources for Elimination of Overdue Fines

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[Economic Barriers to Information Access: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)

[Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity](#)

Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries (SPELL) white paper: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/removingbarrierstoaccess>



Removing Barriers to
Access:
Eliminating Library Fines and
Fees on Children's Materials

Colorado State Library Resources:

<https://cslinsession.cvlites.org/files/2017/12/CSL-in-Session-Fines-and-Fees-Slides.pdf>

<https://www.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/resource-sharing/eliminating-fines-faqs/>

<https://www.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/resource-sharing/eliminating-fines-resources/>

“We’re losing people who need a library’s services most,” [Meg] DePriest [Colorado State Library] says. And fines are a barrier for the very people libraries really want inside their doors: youth and teenagers.

Yesterday’s “shush libraries” are long gone, she says. Today they are dynamic community centers where people of all ages meet and get access to a wide range of information. The measurement of success for a library is the number of patrons using its services not how much they get in fines. And by not collecting fines, they can collect new users instead, says DePriest.

It is common that once an overdue fine reaches a high amount for a borrowed material, the library is not likely to ever see it again. Many people fear they would have to face the angry librarian and the enormous fine that they can’t afford. So, they would simply prefer to never visit the library again out of shame or lack of money.

Thus, the fear of being punished for not finishing a book in time is stressful for the library user and many citizens affirm that they don’t go to the library just because of that. So why not avoid these uncomfortable conversations with the user and consider the elimination of late fines? By simply removing the fine, you offer an incentive for users to free and unrestricted use of the collection.

Bibliography from Colorado State Library: <https://cslinsession.cvlites.org/files/2017/12/Libraries-Are-Dropping-Overdue-Fines-resources.pdf>

End Library Fines Blog: <https://endlibraryfines.info/>



Dawn Wacek, librarian at La Crosse Public Library, Wisconsin. Ted Talk [“A Librarian’s Case Against Overdue Book Fines”](#)

“Why would we continue to operate under a model that hurts our most vulnerable patrons?” Wacek asks. “If our libraries are truly for everyone, they have to get rid of fines. Books have power, information has power. And for the powerless in our communities, being able to connect to that is even more important.”



San Francisco Public Library report:

<https://sfpl.org/uploads/files/pdfs/commission/Fine-Free-Report011719.pdf>

In San Francisco, overdue fines disproportionately affect low-income communities, African American communities, and communities without college degrees. For instance, 11.2% of adult cardholders in the Bayview branch are blocked from using the library due exclusively to overdue fines (not because of lost or unreturned items), significantly more than in any other location and more than three times as many as in high-income areas of San Francisco. *Jose Cisneros, SFPL*

From the report: “the use of overdue fines in SFPL does not align with the library’s current goals. Overdue fines restrict access and exacerbate inequality by disproportionately affecting low-income and racial-minority communities, create conflict between patrons and the library, make inefficient use of staff time, and do not help ensure borrowed materials end up back on library shelves.”

Articles about Michigan Libraries

- <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/02/12/michigan-library-overdue-fine-late-fee/4677904002/>
- https://www.petoskeynews.com/news/community/new-year-no-library-fines/article_0ed64f87-ecab-5f0d-bf19-b0adb13bd84f.html
- <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/detroit-public-library-eliminates-overdue-fines-past-fees>
- <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2019/05/kent-district-library-will-eliminate-late-fines-effective-june-1.html>

Fine Free Maps

- Urban Libraries Council: <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/member-resources/fine-free-map>
- End Library Fines Blog: <https://endlibraryfines.info/fine-free-library-map/>

More Articles

- <https://slate.com/culture/2017/02/librarians-are-realizing-that-overdue-fines-undercut-libraries-missions.html>

In Columbus, Ohio, the library board [announced](#) in December that it would eliminate overdue fines starting on Jan. 1 [2017]. “We’ve shut off access to the library when one of our staunchest principles is trying to provide the widest access to materials that we can,” the system’s CEO, Patrick Losinski, said. “We just felt fines ultimately were counter to the overall purpose and vision of our library.” Instead of issuing daily fines, the library now blocks borrowing privileges for anyone with material more than 21 days late and charges replacement fees after 35 days that are refunded if the item is returned. It already offers a separate kids’ card, which allows children to borrow up to three books at a time and doesn’t charge overdue fines.

A study conducted in the 1990s [found](#) that the average child in Beverly Hills, California, had four times as many books at home as the average child in Compton, California, had in her classroom library. (The average Compton kid, meanwhile, had 2.7 books at home.) More recent research has identified many poor neighborhoods as “[book deserts](#),” with dramatically fewer reading resources than wealthier areas. “We’re disproportionately affecting the people we’re most interested in getting to the library,” said Meg DePriest, the author of a 2016 [white paper](#) recommending that Colorado libraries eliminate fines on children’s materials, “the people who can’t afford to buy books themselves.”

This is a conversation that has been percolating among librarians for several decades now. In her 2005 [journal article](#) on libraries and “socially excluded communities,” librarian Annette DeFaveri described a scenario in which a mother is charged \$25 for a lost children’s book: If the library does not charge for the damaged book, it loses about \$25.00. ... [But] it will cost the library more than \$25.00 to convince this mother to return to the library. It will cost the library more than \$25.00 to persuade this mother that the library is a welcoming community place willing to mount literacy programs aimed at her children, who will not benefit from regular library visits and programs. And when these children are adults, it will cost the library more than \$25.00 to convince them that the library is a welcoming and supportive place for their children.

- <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/imagining-fine-free-future/> Sarah Houghton, director of San Rafael (Calif.) Public Library, said fines get in the way of a library’s mission to serve the entire community, regardless of socio-economic standing. Barriers exist for some populations to pay fines, and by enforcing them, libraries are subverting their core values.
- <https://www.thestranger.com/slog/2019/12/31/42433059/the-seattle-public-library-goes-fine-free> Branches in less affluent neighborhoods currently have twice the share of blocked accounts compared to branches in wealthier neighborhoods, despite the fact that rates of returns in both kinds of neighborhoods are similar. The new policy will therefore end the inequitable impact of fines, and return library access to a significant number of poor people who were barred from checking out materials because they goofed and then didn’t have the money or the inclination to pay up.
- <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2015/11/the-end-of-overdue-fines/> We want to make the library institution as accessible as possible for anybody. We want the poor to be able to come in and lift themselves up; we want the youth to be able to feel unhindered to come into the library and enjoy our programs and materials.