

Comments

Webform submission from: Suggestion Box

1 message

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Thu, Jan 26, 2025 at 9:25 AM

To: bdlmanagement@branchdistrictlibrary.org

Submitted on Thu, 06/26/2025 - 09:25

Submitted by: Anonymous

Submitted values are:

Your Contact Information

Contact Information

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Your Message

Subject

Return of books/overdue fees

Message Body

Please remind me why you no longer charge late fees. What is the incentive for books to be returned on time? I have to often wait for books I have on hold because someone didn't return them on time and there are no consequences if they don't return the books. This is very irritating to me.

The program of no late fees has the potential of penalizing the people who return their books on time. Because the people who return their books on time end up waiting longer when other people don't return their books on time. So the system seems to actually benefit the people who don't return their books on time as opposed to those who do. It seems like you are catering to those who don't follow the rules at the expense of those who do.

Since this question had not been formally asked in the 8 years that BDL has been fine-free, John replied to the patron with the information that ended up being [this post on our website](#). (Also attached below.)

8 Years of Being Fine Free

 District

June 26, 2025

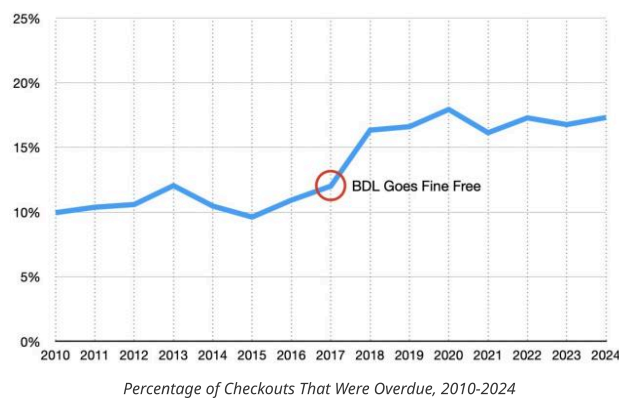


by RuckerJ



In August of 2017, the BDL Board of Trustees voted to eliminate late fees on library materials. This was years before major libraries in places like [New York City](#), [San Diego](#), and [Chicago](#) did the same. For BDL, this move was the beginning of what would take shape a few months later as our [Strategic Plan](#), with its goal of lowering barriers to library access. [Fines and fees have been shown to disproportionately affect low-income and disadvantaged communities](#). Since BDL made this change, [hundreds of libraries around the country](#) have come to the same conclusion and also [eliminated late fees](#).

Critics of these moves have worried that eliminating fines would also remove the incentive for people to return books in a timely manner. As Sabrina Unrein of Syracuse University notes, however, "[there is no strong, wide-scale evidence that supports the claim that library fines are effective for all of the reasons people use to defend them](#)". Many libraries, like Chicago Public Library, actually reported [increases in materials getting returned](#) after they eliminated fines.



At BDL, the percentage of checkouts that were overdue in a given year did go up from 12% in 2017 to 17% in 2024. There is not, however, any conclusive data that shows a causal relationship to going fine free. As you can see from the chart, the trend of increasing overdue items began years before BDL eliminated late fees, and it's tough to pinpoint an exact cause.

Other critics point to the financial cost to libraries, worried that eliminating fines removes a valuable revenue stream from struggling libraries. How true this might be is highly dependent on the library in question, but generally **fine income makes up only a small portion of a typical library's income.**

At BDL, **the amount of fines we actually collected before we went fine-free was only about 6% of what patrons owed the library.** What about the other 94%? The law doesn't give libraries many options to help with debt collections. In Michigan, outstanding library balances of any size must be forgiven after 6 years. Additionally, library fines may not be reported to credit agencies as outstanding debt. Because of these factors, many people simply never pay their bills at all. They keep the long overdue materials and forfeit their library privileges. The library and the patrons both lose.

We must hold patrons accountable for lost and damaged materials—and we do; all patrons with lost or damaged materials are charged for those items. But the library would much rather have our late materials back that are still in good condition so that other patrons can use them. By eliminating late fees, we encourage our patrons to return items, even if they are a little overdue. And, as the chart above shows, the vast majority of our patrons are returning their books *before* they are due. The minority of library users that are a little late can return their materials to us knowing that they won't be out cash or lose their library services because of an overdue book.

There is no perfect solution, but as the library tries to eliminate barriers to accessing library services we hope that our approach strikes a fair balance.



Tell us how the library is doing.

Turn this card in at the library or by mail.

Date: 7/7/2025

Time of Event: 7/3/25-9:30

Library Branch or Department: _____

I was approach by a young man, asked me if I had weed (marijuana). It appeared that he was going around asking other people for "weed."

☒ Check here if you wish to have the library respond to your comment.

Name: Julie Contact: _____

The Coldwater Branch Manager, Christina Holibaugh, has talked to the patron who submitted the comment card. Christina is actively working to identify the individual who is approaching library guests to take appropriate action. At this time the individual has not been identified by library staff.

Google reviews



Local Guide • 62 reviews • 8 photos

★★★★☆ 17 hours ago

ok place to bring the kids



Branch District Library - Sherwood Branch

Owner

7/9/2025