



Monroe County
Public Library

Main Library
303 E. Kirkwood Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47408
812.349.3050

Ellettsville Branch
600 W. Temperance St.
Ellettsville, IN 47429
812.876.1272

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monroe County Public Library Celebrates Bicentennial with Fine-Free Initiative

BLOOMINGTON – At their meeting on Wednesday, January 15, the Monroe County Public Library Board of Directors approved a policy to eliminate overdue fines, effective March 1. The policy waives all unpaid overdue fines and collection agency fees charged prior to implementation, and eliminates fines for all late returns moving forward.

Libraries have long charged overdue fines to promote responsible borrowing and as a modest source of revenue. Recent national trends have shifted to focus on the negative impacts of fines as a deterrent to library use, especially among disadvantaged individuals. Consequently, a growing number of public libraries have eliminated overdue fines in an effort to support all members of their communities, and the American Library Association earlier this year passed a resolution stating that fines constitute a barrier to service and urging their elimination nationwide.

“Discussions about eliminating fines have been taking place in libraries across the country for many years,” said Marilyn Wood, Library Director. “Some of our peer libraries, such as Tippecanoe County Public Library, as well as many larger libraries like Chicago Public Library have eliminated late fines. Their experiences have been very positive—people came back, circulation rates increased, and books once thought lost, were returned. It’s a great way to celebrate the Library’s bicentennial.”

Here in Monroe County, there are significant socio-economic disparities among Library customers. The Library has tried to address access barriers for specific user groups by not charging overdue fines for children’s materials or at outreach service points. In 2016, the Library took another important step by implementing automatic renewals, thereby forestalling overdue fines in many circumstances.

“A lot of things can get in the way of people returning library materials when they intend to, including health issues, vehicle breakdowns, and unanticipated demands of work, school, or family,” said Chris Jackson, Special Audiences Strategist. “Our goal is to provide free, equitable, and convenient access for all residents of Monroe County. Penalizing late returns of Library materials has a disproportionate effect on community members with limited financial means who have fewer alternatives for books, films, and educational media to begin with.”



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While overdue fines and collection agency fees will be waived, patrons owing the replacement cost of a lost or damaged item will continue to be billed accordingly. Moving forward, items that are 21 days overdue will be assumed to be lost and patrons will be billed for them, however, if the items are returned in good condition, the charges will be removed and the account will resume good standing.

As of December 2019, the Library has 2,201 customers who cannot check out materials due to outstanding fees. The Library currently charges \$.25 per day for items kept past their due date with a maximum of \$10 per item in overdue fines. These charges can add up quickly.

“We know there are people in our community who aren’t using the Library simply because they have long-standing overdue items and associated overdue fines,” said Grier Carson, Access and Content Manager. “By removing the financial barrier to Library use, we hope to see an increase in registered patrons and, ultimately, an increase in circulation.”

Libraries across the country that eliminated overdue fines report that patrons still return items on time, that more items are checked out, and that interactions between staff and patrons are positive. Additionally, studies have shown that because of costs associated with tracking and collecting the money, overdue fines are close to cost-neutral. Overdue fine revenue constitutes less than 1% of the Library’s annual operating budget. For more information, visit mcpl.info/nofines.

About Monroe County Public Library (MCPL)

Monroe County Public Library strengthens the community and enriches lives by providing equitable access to information and opportunities to read, learn, connect, and create. A library card allows residents of Monroe County to borrow books, movies, music, and other items; download or stream audiobooks, eBooks, movies, and music; access online resources; and reserve meeting rooms, study rooms, digital creativity facilities, and exhibit spaces. In addition to the Main Library and Ellettsville Branch facilities, community outreach services expand access to Library materials and resources by reducing barriers of literacy, mobility, and geography. For more information, visit mcpl.info.

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