Fine Free
We no longer charge fines on late items. This ensures that all people have access to library books and materials, which is our primary purpose as a public library.

We believe in providing access to knowledge for all.
Eliminating fines for overdue materials means more people in our communities have greater access to our vital materials, resources, and services. Late fines, no matter how small, are a very real and significant burden for low-income individuals, children, and families. These kinds of financial barriers can discourage many people who rely on our libraries, which means they cannot access books required for schoolwork, use public computers or job resources, or simply have a safe, open, welcoming space to visit. Library experts have found that charging overdue fines inhibits access to library materials and services. Studies indicate that even modest penalties deter people from registering for a library card or using the library because of the risk of incurring fines. Rather than motivating borrowers to return items on time, fines act as an inequitable barrier to service, disproportionately impacting minors, students, and community members with limited financial resources.

Frequently Asked Questions About Being Fine Free

What does it mean to be fine-free?
It means exactly what it says, we are free of late fines and we will no longer charge a daily late fine on overdue materials. The Madison County Library System Board of Trustees and staff want to ensure that everyone has access to our resources in as barrier-free ways as possible. Fines tend to penalize more vulnerable individuals or families who cannot afford them. We want ALL people to be able to use our resources without money creating a barrier.

Why go fine-free?
It’s good for our communities. Our communities are stronger and healthier when all people have access to the programs, services, and materials they need to pursue their educational, career, family, and life goals regardless of their ability to pay for them. Libraries are a place open to anyone and everyone. We hope this will encourage prior users to come back to our libraries and attract new users to experience our offerings.

It’s good for our relationships. When you walk through our doors, we want to do our best to help you, not badger you about a late fine. Going fine-free makes a trip to one of our libraries more pleasant for both you and our staff.

Have other libraries eliminated late fines?
Yes! In the U.S., over 500 libraries have adopted fine-free policies, and the number is growing every day.

Won't removing late fines keep people from returning items on time?
Actually, late fines are not effective. Studies have shown that small fines have no impact on material return rates. In fact, once someone has a late fine, they are less likely to return to the library again. Libraries who have removed late fines report few adverse effects on material return rates. If you want to learn about this research, we have included a resource list on this page. The public library model is based on a trusting relationship between borrowers and a valued community resource. Library staff trusts that borrowers will return items on time, so others may use them. Libraries that have adopted fine free policies found that:

• Library card registrations increased
• Borrowing of materials increased
• More library items were returned
• Students returned to the library to use homework resources
• Staff time was redirected from handling fines to more patron-focused services

How will the Library get people to return borrowed materials?
“No fines” does not mean “no responsibility.” The library will still send you courtesy reminders to return your items. Materials that are 45 days overdue after their final renewal are assumed lost and you will be billed for the replacement cost.

Will there still be due dates?
Yes. You are still responsible for returning your items. The library still has a set time limit for materials to be borrowed and we expect items to be returned on time. Be respectful of your fellow library users who may be waiting for items to be returned. Bring back materials when they are due so everyone has equal access to our collections. We do still want all items back!

Will I still receive reminders about returning materials?
The library will still send the following courtesy reminders to return your items:

- 2 days before item is due

- Email reminder

- On due date

- Email reminder that item has auto-renewed
- Items will auto-renew up to 2 times
- Items on hold for another patron will not auto-renew

- 14 days after final due date

- Reminder by email or text
- Account blocked until item returned

- 45 days after final due date

- Notified by email, text or mail
- Account billed for replacement cost
- Account blocked until item returned, paid for or replaced

Do I still have to pay a fine that was on my account prior to MCLS going fine-free?
If you have overdue fines from MCLS that you accrued before we went fine-free, you are no longer required to pay these fines. We have cleared many of the accounts, but if you still have a fine that appears on your account, please speak to a staff at the Circulation Desk for help clearing your account.

Fines have been waived, so why does my account still have a balance?
MCLS is doing away with overdue fines. Fees for lost or damaged materials remain. Past replacement fees for lost or damaged items still apply and need to be paid. If you have charges from lost or damaged material, please speak with us and we will work with you to find an equitable solution. If you have long overdue items, returning the materials is the best way to clear your account.

What happens if someone doesn't return their items?
Materials not on hold for other patrons will have 2 automatic renewals. If items are not returned by the final due date, they will be considered late and must be renewed in person or returned before additional items are checked out. Borrowing privileges will be suspended at all MCLS libraries. Patrons will be sent overdue reminders asking them to return the items once the item is late and periodically afterwards until the item is 45 days overdue from the final due date. Materials that are 45 days overdue from the final due date are assumed lost and patrons will be charged a processing and replacement fee unless the materials are returned.

Is EVERYTHING free of overdue fines? Almost everything! Books, movies, audiobooks, magazines, and downloadable materials are all fine-free.

How will this affect the library's budget?
As a good steward of taxpayer money, MCLS is always carefully watching the bottom line. However, any loss of overdue fine revenue is tiny compared with the good this new policy will do for our communities. Overdue fines account for less than 1% of the library system's overall income and going fine-free will not significantly impact the budget moving forward. Fines have never been a sustainable form of revenue for the library. In addition, with the implementation of the auto-renew feature in 2019, fines had already been significantly reduced. Above all, it is worth it to us to forgo potential funds from fines to remove barriers to library use.

I’ve always thought of paying my fines as my donation to the library. Can I still donate?
Yes! Your donation will support critical library programs and services and can be made at any of our libraries.

What is the difference between a fine and a fee?
Fines are punitive. Fees are for library services and products such as copying, printing, material replacement costs, etc.

Fine Free Resources
[End Library Fines](https://endlibraryfines.info/)

[Eliminating Fines FAQ – Colorado Virtual Library (2019)](https://www.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/resource-sharing/eliminating-fines-faqs/)

[We Wanted Our Patrons Back - Public Libraries Scrap Late Fines to Alleviate Inequity (NPR, November 30, 2019](https://www.npr.org/2019/11/30/781374759/we-wanted-our-patrons-back-public-libraries-scrap-late-fines-to-alleviate-inequi?fbclid=IwAR0hrJgNXoTgUsuHV5l-LmdTD14EuksKPNtOCYYGlXeIxDVhSnYNL0fnuzo))

[More libraries are going fine-free. That’s good for everyone.
(Washington Post editorial, June 17, 2018)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2018/06/15/7ad6f80e-709d-11e8-afd5-778aca903bbe_story.html?noredirect=on)

[Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity (American Library Association 2019)](http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/council/council_documents/2019_ms_council_docs/ALA%20CD%2038%20RESOLUTION%20ON%20MONETARY%20LIBRARY%20FINES%20AS%20A%20FORM%20OF%20SOCIAL%20JUSTICE%20Revised%201_27_0.pdf)

[LONG OVERDUE: Eliminating Fines on Overdue Materials to Improve Access to San Francisco Public Library (2019)](https://sfpl.org/uploads/files/pdfs/commission/Fine-Free-Report011719.pdf)

[Removing Barriers to Access: Eliminating Fines and Fees on Children’s Materials (Meg J Depriest, prepared for the Colorado State Library, 2016)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CMCLS%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CTemp%5Ced32r282016internet.pdf)

[Long Overdue: Why public libraries are finally eliminating the late-return fine (2017)](https://slate.com/culture/2017/02/librarians-are-realizing-that-overdue-fines-undercut-libraries-missions.html)

[Free is Key: Library Fines and Access](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-a5B6UXF2c)