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Berks County Public Libraries Wipe Past Fines, Go Fine Free

For immediate release—The Berks County Public Library System is pleased to announce that, beginning January 1, 2023, all system-member libraries will be clearing overdue fines from all patron accounts as part of their fine free policy change. Additionally, all traditional library materials including books, audio, and visual materials will no longer accrue fines for being late.

The change to remove the outdated financial barrier was unanimously accepted by all library directors in the library system—a move which was supported by the three Berks County Commissioners.

“Libraries are free sources of information, access, and technology,” Commissioners Chair Christian Y. Leinbach said. “We’ve seen some great things come from our county libraries and the library system over the past few years, and all three commissioners are fully supportive of clearing past fines and allowing Berks County residents to return to and fully utilize the resources available at their library.”

In September, the County Commissioners approved of a proposal that was offered to all system member libraries to pay off outstanding fines on all patron accounts utilizing County lost revenue funds. Libraries accepting the proposal would receive a one-time payment to become fine free for all of their traditional materials.

The decision to purge late fines from all accounts impacts 21,326 library patrons, some which are barred from library services after accruing more than \$10.00 in fines.

“This decision has been a long time coming and is a significant step forward to making the library more accessible,” said Amy Resh, system administrator for the Berks County Public Library System, referring to updates in the system’s borrowing policy which removed fines from children’s materials years ago and young adult materials in 2020.

“Patrons should not be punished for returning items a few days late. That’s not the purpose of a library,” Resh said. “We’re hopeful that by offering a clean slate to all accounts with overdue fines, people will be able to return to using their library again.”

While the decision to go fine free affects the majority of library materials available, there are a few exceptions for specialty items such as admission passes, equipment, Library of Things materials, and items borrowed from outside the system.

Additionally, long-overdue items, regardless of its fine free status, will be marked as lost and accrue fees for each item.

“Although overdue fines will no longer be assessed on traditional library materials, patrons should continue to return their items by their due dates so that others may be able to enjoy and borrow those materials,” Resh said.

Additional information about the library system’s transition to fine free is available online at www.berkslibraries.org/fine-free.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please visit your local library or online at www.berkslibraries.org.

About the Berks County Library Systems: The Berks County Public Library (BCPL) System is a department of the County of Berks, serving 411,442 county residents across 866 square miles and 72 municipalities since 1986. Through the support of the Berks County commissioners, BCPL staff aids in strengthening the Berks County community by providing centralized support for the 19 full-service member libraries and four branches. For more information, please visit www.berkslibraries.org.