



# MLA to Z

*The Newsletter of the Maine Library Association*

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## **Maine Library Association**

mainelibrary@gmail.com

55 Main Street, Unit 49

Belchertown, MA 01007

207.744.7919

mainelibraries.org

## **MLA library wage study is underway**

*by Sonya Durney, Vice President, MLA*

Over the summer, a subcommittee of MLA's Executive Board began gathering data and holding conversations in preparation for an in-depth study of library wages in Maine. Our subcommittee is chaired by Kate Wing (MLA Member at Large, Bowdoin College) and includes Jen Alvino (MLA Past-President, Windham Public Library), Lee Koenigs (MLA Rural and Small Libraries Interest Group Chair, Libby Memorial Library), and myself.

MLA wants to support a vibrant library community in Maine, which is an attractive employment landscape for job-seeking librarians. Yet Maine seems to be a state where good-paying library jobs can be difficult to find.

In 2020, greater than 30 percent of Maine library directors made less than \$15 per hour. According to the MIT Wage Calculator, a single person living in Maine with zero children needs to make \$14.92 an hour. That number jumps to over \$30 an hour once you have one child.

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# MLA library wage study is underway


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**MLA wants to ensure that employers and job seekers have the data and tools to effectively advocate for fair wages for all library staff.**

These numbers don't add up. Several of our peer states offer library directors much higher wages. For instance, Rhode Island library directors make an average of \$36 an hour.

Our committee has met with Laura Horn (Connecticut Library Association), Sarah Campbell (Portland Public Library), and Molly O'Connell (Maine Association of Nonprofits) to learn more about other wage studies and to ask for some advice as we embark on this journey. We will likely need to hire a consultant for our in-depth wage study and seek funding, and we have some decisions to make on the scope of the project. For example, how are we comparing salaries: Maine librarian to Maine librarian, Maine librarian to librarian in other states, or Maine librarians to professionals in a comparative field? Lots to think about! Thank you, Laura, Sarah, and Molly.

We also conducted an informal survey of Maine library workers (n=295) in June 2021 to get a better sense of the current state of Maine library wages. In addition to gathering some basic education, salary, benefits, and student loan information, we found that only 24% of respondents feel they are adequately paid for their job duties and 61% of respondents have considered looking for another job based strictly on wages.

MLA wants to ensure that employers and job seekers have the data and tools to effectively advocate for fair wages for all library staff. Please reach out to our subcommittee if you have any feedback regarding this study. We look forward to sharing our findings and wage advocacy materials at the MLA Annual Conference in May. 

# Letter from the President

Wynter Giddings



In late September, I was thinking about the fact that it has been two years since we gathered at Sunday River for our annual conference, which made me a little sad. Our virtual conference in May went very well, but I am so looking forward to meeting in the mountains (in-person) next year (May 23–24, 2022), which is the plan as of now. Our conference committee had its first meeting in mid-October to start brainstorming ideas for a theme and for keynote speakers. Fingers crossed!

I'm happy to report that our popular Coffee Chat series has started up again and is being coordinated by our new Membership Chair, Sarah Skawinski of Portland Public Library. We had more than 60 people register for "RA For Everyone" in September and it is looking like we will have quite a few attendees for the October chat about CloudLibrary. In November, we will chat about MLA's interest and advocacy groups, which we highly encourage members to get involved with. I'm so pleased that these chats have been popular, as we want to offer professional development and networking opportunities year-round, as a benefit of MLA membership. If you have an idea for a coffee chat and would be interested in helping to facilitate that discussion, I encourage you to reach out to Sarah at [membership@mainelibraries.org](mailto:membership@mainelibraries.org).

I recently attended the Chapter Leaders Forum at NELA (virtual), where the presidents of the New England ALA chapters and NELA convened to discuss what we've been up to over the past year, and what we are hoping to achieve this year. The other NE chapters are also hoping to hold in-person spring conferences, and are similarly working on ideas to better coordinate efforts across their states and build more engagement with their committees and interest groups. This group has begun to meet quarterly to share ideas, concerns, experiences, and resources.

Finally, I want to welcome the new Chair (Savannah Sessions) and Vice Chair (Amy Stone) of our Legislative Committee. They are both off to a great start. Stay tuned for information about 2022 Maine Library Legislative Day activities, which are in the works!



# Bangor Public Library hosts Americans and the Holocaust exhibit

*by Meg Gray, Bangor Public Library*

Bangor Public Library is one of 50 U.S. libraries — and the only New England library — selected to host *Americans and the Holocaust*, a traveling exhibit from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum that examines the motives, pressures, and fears that shaped Americans' responses to Nazism, war, and genocide in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s.



The touring library exhibit is based on the special exhibit of the same name at the Museum in Washington, D.C. It will travel to U.S. libraries between 2020 and 2022.

“We are honored to have been selected from a

pool of more than 250 applicants to host this exhibition,” said Ben Treat, director of the Bangor Public Library. “This exhibit will enable the people of our region to consider the ethics of action — and inaction — and the uses to which we can put our outrage. Hindsight reveals how the U.S. could have made a difference in the lives of millions of Jews in Europe. Reflecting upon the exhibit, visitors will discover how to make a difference in their own time.”

*Americans and the Holocaust* will be on display at the Bangor Public Library, along with a series of related special events, December 1, 2021 – January 14, 2022. Information related to the special events can be on the [library’s website](#).

Based on extensive new research of that period, *Americans and the Holocaust* addresses important themes in American history, exploring the many factors — including the Great Depression, isolationism, xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism — that influenced decisions made by the U.S. government, the news media, organizations, and individuals as

## Bangor Public Library hosts Holocaust exhibit

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they responded to Nazism. This exhibit will challenge the commonly held assumptions that Americans knew little and did nothing about the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews as the Holocaust unfolded.

Drawing on a remarkable collection of primary sources from the 1930s and '40s, the exhibit focuses on the stories of individuals and groups of Americans who took action in response to Nazism. It challenges

visitors to consider the responsibilities and obstacles faced by individuals — from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to ordinary Americans — who made difficult choices, sought to effect change, and, in a few cases, took significant risks to help victims of Nazism, even as rescue never became a government priority.

The exhibit is free and will be open to the public during regular library hours: Monday through Thursday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

The library has also made the exhibit available for field trips, 8:30 a.m. – 10 a.m. on weekdays for teachers and students to explore it privately. The library can host one class, up to 35 people, per day. Information about field trips and the field trip application, can be found on the [Bangor Public Library website](#).

*Americans and the Holocaust: A Traveling Exhibition for Libraries* is an educational initiative of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Library Association.

Americans and the Holocaust was made possible by the generous support of lead sponsor Jeannie & Jonathan Lavine. Additional major funding was provided by the Bildners — Joan & Allen z"l, Elisa Spungen & Rob, Nancy & Jim; and Jane and Daniel Och. The Museum's exhibitions are also supported by the Lester Robbins and Sheila Johnson Robbins Traveling and Special Exhibitions Fund, established in 1990. 🌱





Jeff Eastman



**To fine or not to fine?** That question has been circulating around the public library world for years, but I am not sure it has ever been addressed in the pages of *MLA to Z*.

A growing trend among libraries is to eliminate fines for returning items late. Many if not all public libraries in Maine suspended fines during the pandemic. The pandemic exposed areas of American society where inequalities and broken systems that had been allowed to fester for a long time suddenly received attention. If there is a silver lining to the pandemic, it may be that problems that had momentum behind them suddenly stopped, and space for imaginative solutions opened. If it had once been impossible to imagine fine-free libraries, we just proved that we can do it.

The truth is that while the question of whether to eliminate fines has been in the air since the 1970s and a growing number of libraries have been scrapping fines, only four years ago still 90 percent of libraries still charged their patrons for overdue books [cite]. If the pandemic could be a catalyst for change, perhaps this year we will see more libraries go fine-free. The library where I work, Merrill Memorial Library (MML) in Yarmouth, has decided not to resume charging late fees, and as a staff person there, I am excited to observe what the change in policy will bring.

In case, dear readers, you have not considered how we could get by without fines, let me briefly rehash the arguments. Actually, a good, [short summary of why fines are bad](#) is available online in a pamphlet prepared earlier this year by the Galecia Group, a California-based library consultancy. The author's feet are planted firmly in the camp to eliminate fines, but her full-throated defense of her position is convincing.



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First, what are some of the reasons why a library might want to keep fines in place?

- Fines are an important source of revenue for the library.
- Fines guarantee that patrons return materials on time.
- Fines teach patrons, especially children, to be responsible.

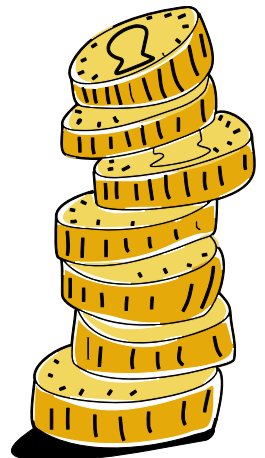
These are not the only reasons, and they are not necessarily even valid reasons. It is just how the argument typically goes.

The arguments against fines, and against lines of reasoning for fines, have been:

- Fines do not guarantee that patrons return materials on time. There are effective ways to reduce late returns, such as an email reminder a few days ahead of the due date.
- It is a parent's role to teach responsibility to children, not the library's. Besides, children tend to have little control over when they get to go to the library.
- Fines are unwelcoming and discourage people from using the library.
- Fines place a disproportionate burden on the people with the least ability to pay them and the greatest need to use the library, i.e. children and less wealthy people.
- Fines can be the source of stress, shame, and embarrassment for patrons. It can be stressful to staff, too, to have to deny a patron access or to publicly embarrass them because their account has been blocked.
- Fines are a form of barrier between the library and public, and we should always attempt to take down barriers whenever possible.
- Fines perpetuate the stereotype of the mean, rules-obsessed, shush-happy librarian, rather than helpful, eager, friendly librarian that we all know is more accurate.
- Eliminating fines will not produce bad side effects; rather it will generate good will in the community — as valuable as any revenue stream, though harder to measure.

Galecia gives stats showing how costly it has been for some libraries (net negative, even) to impose fines, chase down patrons, and to hire collection agencies. (Frankly, I was shocked and dismayed that libraries resort to using collection agencies. Call my previous attitude naïve bliss, but I am glad that my library has never entertained the idea sending collection agencies after patrons for overdue fines.)

Notice I did not attempt to refute the first pro-fine point about fines being an important source of revenue. Galecia did refute it, as did other



articles I read while preparing for this piece, but I don't quite buy it. Different libraries have different ways of funding their operations, and while I would hesitate to call fines a good revenue source that you can always rely on, some libraries nevertheless do rely on them. The pot that was filled by fines at MML was not insignificant, but we have been fortunate not to rely on it to keep the doors open. We have been able to make up the difference by utilizing gains from our endowment. (Also, we put our money from fines toward programming, and we have not spent much on that over the last year.) For some libraries though, eliminating fines might simply be fiscally out of bounds.

Libraries that could never completely eliminate fines could consider some other ways of partially eliminating them, and reap some of the beneficial effects.

- Eliminate fines on specific materials or for groups of patrons. You could consider halting fines on children's materials or children's accounts.
- Make specific patrons exempt from fines. If certain patrons have health or transportation problems, and they manage to return borrowed items but not always on time, the good of letting them off the hook far outweighs all the 10-cent fines the library could possibly collect from them.
- A day or month of "amnesty," when fines can be wiped away on any overdue book returned during that period, could prompt embarrassed or reluctant patrons to bring back their books en masse, and your library could recover a number of books that had long ago been declared missing or lost. You could also recover patrons who have been avoiding the library out fear of hefty fines.
- Some alternatives to fines that I read about in the [Atlantic article](#) include collecting food for a food pantry, as they do in Fairfax County, Virginia, and allowing children to "read down" their fines rather than pay them down with money, as they do in Queens, New York, where 30 minutes of reading is good for one library buck.



I am excited that my library is eliminating fines, and I realize that it is not something that every library will be willing or able to do. Coming off of a whole year without fines, though, it almost seems less radical to continue to go without them than it does to reinstate them. I hope that this is only one of many positive changes that comes out of this dreadful pandemic.







# **YOUR (friendly, neighborhood) COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU. (Yes, you!)**

The Communications Committee of the MLA is responsible putting out this quarterly newsletter, maintaining MLA's website and social media presence, keeping members up to date on MLA happenings, and awards at the annual conference.

We are seeking one or two MLA members to join us in our communications efforts, particularly if you regularly use Facebook and/or Twitter and could take on a big share of those duties. Also (not to scare you), one of us — any of the current Communications Committee members or a new recruit — will need to be vice-chair of the committee. The added role of the vice-chair would be to assume the responsibilities of the chair, should I need to step down for any reason.

If interested, let's chat! Email me at [communications@mainelibraries.org](mailto:communications@mainelibraries.org).

— Jeff Eastman, Communications Committee Chair

# Librarian in the Spotlight

*Sponsored by Thorndike Press*

## Karen McCarthy Eger

Library Director  
South Berwick Public Library



**How long have you been working at South Berwick, and what was your path to get there?**

I was happily working at the Springvale Public Library when the job of library director opened in my hometown. I worked in Rochester, NH (Head of Children's Services for 18 years) and Springvale (Children's Librarian for four years and Library Director for six years), sometimes wondering what it would be like to work where I lived. I reluctantly applied "to explore" the possibility, and the idea of moving from a tiny, historic space into a newly renovated (large, as in church sanctuary) space won me over. The building and the fundraising was half done, the collection and a motley assortment of shelving and furniture came and occupied part of the new building, while we operated and worked to complete the project. I have had the pleasure of working in this magnificent space for close to 10 years.

**What drew you to a career in libraries in the first place?**

My college background in children's theater and environmental conservation led me to gigs in both, always working with people. When I was ready to stop roaming around, my theater professor suggested I should investigate children's librarianship, because I wouldn't have to put down the puppets. I began taking library classes through the University of Rhode Island and looking for that first job which I found at Rochester Public Library in New Hampshire.

**What has been your favorite aspect of working in libraries?**

I have many favorite things about working in libraries which is why, after nearly 40 years, it is a bit hard to tear myself away! The family of people that are your patrons is the best thing; I missed my "families" when I changed locations. The other best thing has been that

## Spotlight: Karen Eger

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every day is different, and one never knows, when the doors open and the phone starts to ring, what the day will bring.

**Have you read anything lately that you would recommend?**

Though historical fiction isn't my go-to genre, *Hamnet* by Maggie O'Farrell and *The Weight of Ink* by Rachel Kadish are some of my favorite 2021 reads, along with *Nothing to See Here* by Kevin Wilson.

**Congratulations on your upcoming retirement! What are you looking forward to?**

**Any parting words of wisdom for the Maine library community?**

I am looking forward to not being expected to have all the answers! I can go skiing when it snows and before it melts! (Southern Maine climate change in action.) I can finally join the community chorus. For words of wisdom, I turned to my bulletin board and see an article that has followed me around since 2007: "The Perseus black hole emits sound waves that are 57 octaves below Middle C." Keep your sense of wonder and curiosity. 



# THORNDIKE PRESS

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The Maine Library Association is grateful to the support of Thorndike Press, who will donate a selection of large-print books to the Maine State Library in honor of Janet's spotlight. Located in Waterville, Thorndike Press has been publishing large print for over 30 years.

# THANK YOU




## Legislative Advocacy Group to poll MLA members on their policy concerns

Hello from the Legislative Committee. We are the people on MLA who fight for legislation that is favorable to Maine libraries and empower MLA members to have stronger voices.

We have been thinking of new ways to meet the needs of our local librarians and how we can best support legislation that impacts us in our daily work. We have put together a brief survey (we promise it's only a few questions and less than 5 minutes of your time!) to help us understand which topics matter most to you. You should receive an email soon with a link to the survey.

Stay well and safe, and we look forward to hearing from you!

— Savannah Sessions (Chair) and Amy Stone (Vice Chair), Legislative Advocacy Group 



### Calendar of Events

**Nov. 2:** Archives and Special Collections  
Interest Group Fall Gathering

**Nov. 18:** Coffee Chat: Introduction to MLA  
Interest Groups

**Jan. 20:** Coffee Chat: TBA

**Feb. 17:** Coffee Chat: TBA



# WRITE TO US.

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Tell us what's happening at your library. New programs. Innovative ideas.  
Letters to the editor. Photos. Long articles. Short shoutouts.  
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