

Michigan Library Advocacy Day 2026



LIBRARIES LIGHT THE WAY

TRIAL COURT FUNDING REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS DISASTROUS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Diverting penal and civil fines away from libraries would mean fewer educational opportunities and fewer essential services for communities across the state.

In 2017, the Michigan Legislature created the Trial Court Funding Commission and a subsequent workgroup that spent several years developing recommendations to help stabilize the court's funding system. The workgroup's final concept paper proposes that all revenue from penal fines and civil infractions be redirected away from police, libraries, and abuse victims, with no suggestion for replacement funding. Along with other essential community services, this would have a disastrous impact on Michigan's public libraries.

Since 1835, the Michigan Constitution has mandated that penal fines be allocated to libraries. Article VIII, section 9 of the State Constitution reads: *"All fines assessed and collected in the several counties, townships, and cities for any breach of the penal laws shall be exclusively applied to the support of such public libraries, and county law libraries as provided by law."*

Further, MCL 600.8831 provides that non-criminal-code fines, levied for violations of certain state laws, are designated as civil infractions that also go to public libraries. These include most traffic fines. Penal and civil fines provide nearly as much support for public libraries as the Michigan legislature does annually.

The Library of Michigan reported that total penal fines distributed to libraries in 2024 amounted to approximately \$16.8 million. In many libraries, particularly smaller and rural systems, penal fines make up a higher share of operating budgets. Changes to the flow of penal fines and civil infraction revenues would disproportionately affect these small, rural, and underfunded libraries. While we sympathize with the need to address challenges with trial court funding, siphoning those revenues away from libraries creates yet another funding crisis.

The Michigan Library Association is joined by many other organizations that oppose the trial court funding recommendations, including the Michigan Association of Counties, the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Townships Association, the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Michigan Sheriffs' Association.

Public libraries provide access to early-literacy programs, digital resources, broadband and technology, workforce and small-business assistance, after-school learning, and trusted support in navigating information. For many residents, public libraries are the only place they can freely access those services. Redirecting these funds without a plan for stable replacement revenue would severely undermine the ability of public libraries to deliver these critical services and would harm the individuals and communities who rely on them most.

ASK: We respectfully ask that the legislature oppose funding models that divert funding away from libraries without a plan for replacement support.