

# CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

## Guide to the Cards for Kids Act



### INTRODUCTION

Illinois residents who reside outside the taxing area of a public library in an unincorporated area have the option to purchase a library card to obtain public library services. However, nonresidents must pay a fee at least equal to the cost paid by residents, who pay for their library services through property taxes. Often, this means students in unincorporated areas must pay hundreds of dollars to access basic services provided by libraries. Unincorporated areas are regions of land not governed by a local municipal corporation, but a larger administrative division, such as a township or county.

For some residents, intergovernmental agreements or collaborative management agreements between agencies such as school districts and public libraries allow nonresidents access to library cards without individual purchases. For more, go to <https://bit.ly/IntergovernmentalAgreementsforPublicLibraryService>. However, these agreements do not exist in many areas, leaving residents of unincorporated areas with limited and expensive access to libraries.

### WHAT IS THE CARDS FOR KIDS ACT?

The Cards for Kids Act prohibits libraries that offer nonresident library cards from charging fees for such cards to nonresident students whose household falls at or below the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Income Eligibility Guidelines.

Notably, this is not a mandate to offer library cards to all nonresidents; however, those that do cannot charge fees to this population of students.

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## WHO DOES THE CARDS FOR KIDS ACT AFFECT?

Students in unincorporated areas whose household income falls at or below the U.S Department of Agriculture's Income Eligibility Guidelines do not have to pay for library cards under the Cards for Kids Act. Therefore, students must both a) live in households whose incomes fall at or below the USDA's Income Eligibility Guidelines, and b) live in unincorporated areas. The following figures are for 2020-2021.

Household Size	Annual Income
1	12,760
2	17,240
3	21,720
4	26,200
5	30,680
6	35,160
7	39,640
8	44,120
Each Additional Family Member	+4,480

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Income Eligibility Guidelines. These figures  
also form the basis for reduced price and free  
school lunch programs.

Current information will be posted on the U.S.D.A website, or go to  
<https://bit.ly/USDAIncomeEligibilityGuidelines>

To determine whether you live within a library district or in an area not covered by a local library, access the Illinois Library Service Areas Map, available on the Illinois Secretary of State's website or at <https://bit.ly/IllinoisLibraries>. Enter your address to determine if you live in a colored area of the map, which will correspond to a local library district; uncolored portions denote areas not incorporated in a library district. For a User Guide to the Illinois Library Service Areas Map, go to <https://bit.ly/IllinoisLibraryUserGuide>.

According to the Illinois Library Association, the Cards for Kids Act will currently apply to about 3% of the Illinois student population.

## **WHY IS THE CARDS FOR KIDS ACT IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW?**

Although libraries offer services to nonresidents without a library card, these services are limited. This means students in unincorporated areas who are either unable to pay the necessary fees or cannot apply for a card at all (per local library rules) are less likely to access services, increasing their educational vulnerability. For example, school districts have often looked to public libraries and their services to combat summertime learning loss, contributing substantially to achievement gaps between lower and higher-income students. Lower-income students in unincorporated areas who do not have access to these services are more likely to feel the effects of the summer learning slide. Therefore, by expanding library accessibility, the Cards for Kids Act is a valuable way to further the educational security of eligible students.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic increases the importance of online education. As the law's sponsor, Senator Laura Murphy explained public libraries provide various online learning resources, such as e-books and webinars. Therefore, the Cards for Kids Act expanded the accessibility of online educational material for students when their physical access to such resources may be strained. Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic heightens the importance and relevance of the Cards for Kids Act.

## **STUDENT ADVOCACY DROVE THE CARDS FOR KIDS ACT**

Illinois State Senator Laura Murphy sponsored the Cards for Kids Act after learning about this library coverage gap from high school students in her district. One of the students, Daniel Salgado-Alvarez, had tried to check out books from his local library over the summer break before finding out that he would face hundreds of dollars as a resident of an unincorporated area in fees. During the next school year, Salgado-Alvarez and his classmates approached Senator Murphy as part of a class project.

Though the bill did not receive a floor vote when it was introduced during the 2019 session of the General Assembly, the law passed as an amendment to an emergency bill during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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This brochure is meant to provide a general guide to the Illinois Cards for Kids Act and should not be considered legal advice.

The Citizen Advocacy Center (CAC) is an award-winning, non-partisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, free community legal organization. Founded in 1994, dedicated to building democracy for the 21st century by strengthening the public's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance.

If you are interested in more information, becoming a volunteer, or making a tax-deductible contribution to the Center, please feel free to contact us at:

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