

Library Cards for All Survey Report



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Table of Contents

Brief.....	3
Methods.....	3
Results.....	3
Discussion.....	7
Recommendations.....	8
List of Library Policies.....	9

*Special thanks to all the libraries that participated in the study.
We truly appreciate their contributions to this very important work.*

Brief

Patrons without permanent addresses are 50% more likely to be responsible with library materials than the average patron. There is no apparent connection between limits on the number of items or A/V materials addressless patrons can borrow and whether or not they owe more than average patrons. The results objectively demonstrate that there is no reason not to issue cards to patrons without permanent addresses, nor limit what they can check out.

Methods

We distributed a voluntary survey to libraries across New Jersey, which contained 24 questions for participants to answer. Participants were those who worked in libraries in New Jersey, and they were recruited through emails from the New Jersey Library Association and the researchers themselves. Participants were not paid to answer the survey questions, and they were not incentivized in any way. They were invited to fill out the survey to the best of their knowledge through Google Forms. The questions aimed to answer whether participants' libraries offered library cards to addressless patrons, as well as how much money was owed in fines among addressless patrons as compared to all patrons on average. The sample included 29 survey responses, with information from 10 libraries being used in our data set.

Results

We received 29 survey responses, roughly 10% of New Jersey's 299 libraries. Of those 29, we have complete data on library card usage from 10 libraries throughout the state. An additional 4 libraries responded to say they do offer library cards to patrons without permanent addresses, but either have not issued any cards yet, or had incomplete data (Mount Laurel, Montville as per MAIN Policy, Sussex County Library System, and New Brunswick). The remaining libraries do not issue cards to addressless patrons.

Of the 10, patrons without permanent addresses at 6 libraries owe less than the average patron, and at 4, they owe more than average (Table 1). This means that addressless patrons are 50% more likely to be more responsible with library materials than patrons in general. Further, there is no apparent connection between limits on the number of items or A/V materials addressless patrons can borrow and whether or not they owe more than average.

Table 1

	Library	Average Amount Owed per Addressless Patron	Amount Owed per Average Patron ^[1]	Limit on Number of Items for Addressless Patrons?	Limit on A/V Materials for Addressless Patrons?	Addressless Patrons Owe More or Less than Average?
1	Newark	\$59.87	\$126.50	2	Limited	Less
2	Monroe	\$0.00	\$2.65	Unlimited	Unlimited	Less
3	Bernards	\$23.58 ^[4]	\$6.77	Unlimited ^[2]	Unlimited	More
4	Madison	\$0.15	\$2.47	Unlimited	Unlimited	Less
5	Morristown and Morris Twp.	\$43.75	\$7.15	25	Limited ^[3]	More
6	Gloucester County	\$5.55	\$9.06	6	Unlimited	Less
7	Elizabeth	\$10.04	\$22.97	2	Limited	Less
8	Long Branch	\$31.96	\$16.34	3	Unlimited	More
9	Plainfield	\$31.95	\$23.35	4	Limited	More
10	Trenton	\$1.16	\$1.95	2	Unlimited	Less

1) Average patrons are made up of all patrons.

2) All patrons have an equal limit.

3) Limit will likely be removed in the future.

4) Has a known outlier that makes up a significant portion of the total amount owed. Outliers not removed from totals, as average patrons likely have outliers as well.

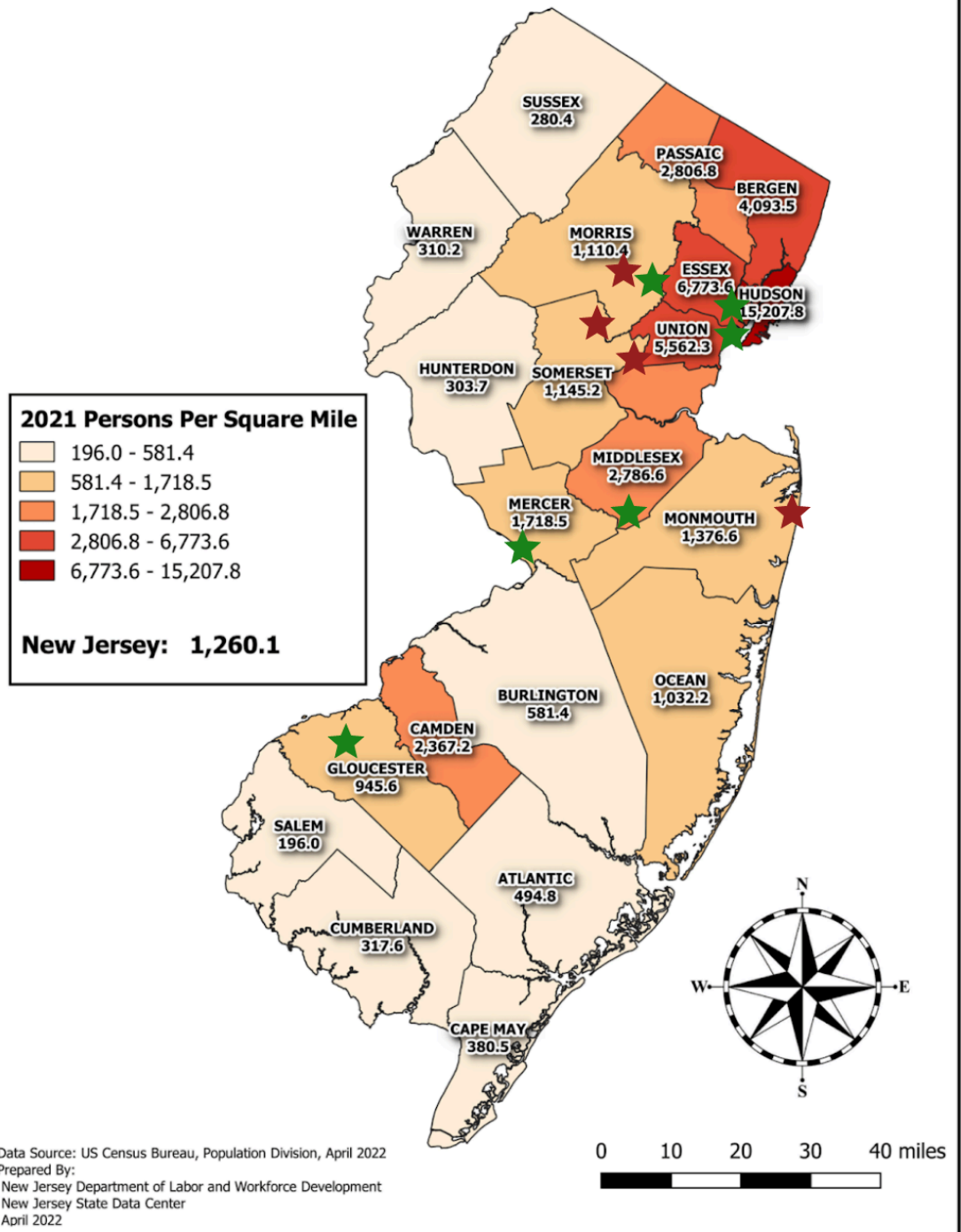
Summing the averages for amounts owed by addressless patrons and for average patrons, we get \$208.01 and \$219.21, respectively, a negligible difference.

We drilled deeper into the Elizabeth data to look at the borrowing habits of addressless teens. They only make up 3% of the overall total. 90% of addressless teens do not owe fines. Together, they have an average of \$0.63. That's far lower than the average for all addressless patrons at Elizabeth (\$10.04) and the average for all patrons (\$22.97).

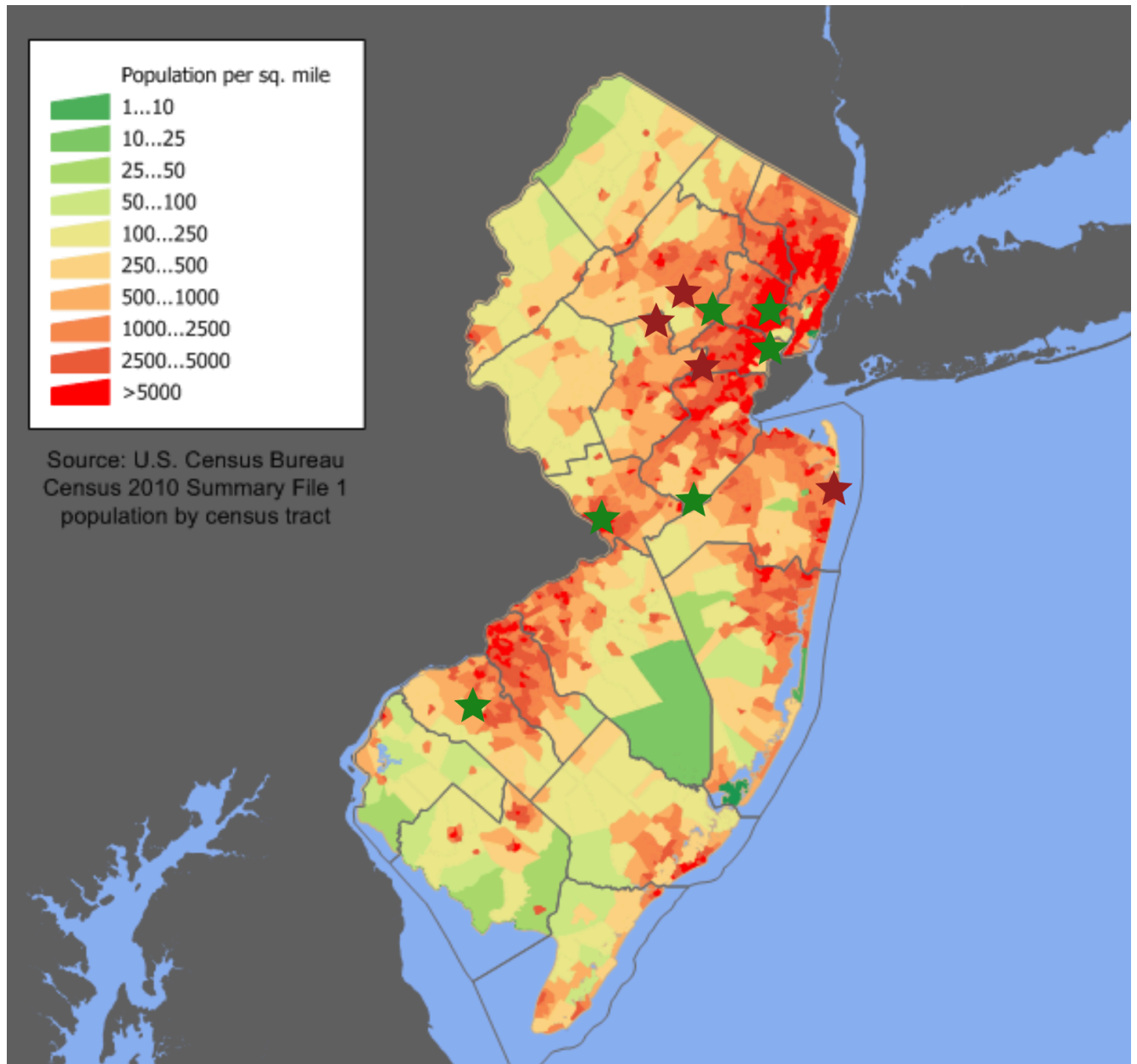
The libraries in the sample are distributed mostly throughout North and Central New Jersey (Map 1 and Map 2). They are located around major population centers and in all but the lowest population density counties.

Map 1

2021 Population Density: New Jersey Counties



Map 2



There appears to be no correlation between type of community and amount owed (Table 2). It is possible there is a correlation between community size and amount owed.

Table 2

Library	Type of Community	Population	Addressless Patrons Owe More or Less than Average?
Madison	Suburban	16,937	Less
Bernards	Semi-rural	27,830	More
Long Branch	Urban	31,667	More
Morristown and Morris Twp.	Urban	43,154	More
Monroe	Semi-rural	48,594	Less
Plainfield	Urban	54,586	More
Trenton	Urban	90,871	Less
Elizabeth	Urban	137,298	Less
Gloucester County	Suburban	302,294	Less
Newark	Urban	311,549	Less

Discussion

Due to the small sample size, we can't yet speculate as to what forces are at work causing addressless patrons at some libraries to owe more or less than average. Likewise, we can't delve deeper into the possible correlations of certain privileges to the amount owed. More research is needed to explore these subjects.

Not all addressless patrons are what people might traditionally consider homeless. Libraries report these patrons to include victims of domestic abuse, people in the VA health care systems, and youth in crisis.

We suspect the smaller municipalities are more likely to have fewer support structures for their homeless population, decreasing their stability and thus their ability to return items in a timely manner. That said, low population size is no excuse to not issue cards. If those higher amounts owed by addressless patrons are due to lack of services, that's even more reason to issue cards.

Finally, it's worth noting that bills for patrons who have "proven" their permanent addresses come back all the time. Patrons are always moving and changing phone numbers. Permanent contact information even for those with permanent addresses has never actually been achievable.

Recommendations

Given the data we have collected, we recommend all libraries allow the issuing of library cards to patrons without permanent addresses. We recommend that there be no limitation on the number of items or A/V materials that these patrons can check out. Libraries risk losing potential lifelong library patrons when we erect barriers to library membership, which we are charged with providing freely to all. Using unnecessarily prohibitive policies, we actively undermine our mission to provide equitable access to information when we cut off pathways to that information for our most vulnerable community members.

We recommend that the cards issued to addressless patrons be the same as those issued to patrons with permanent addresses, not just in terms of privileges, but also the physical card itself. Having anything that distinguishes patrons as homeless or in a temporary housing situation is discriminatory and a violation of privacy. Given the sensitive nature of addressless patrons' circumstances, we recommend library staff provide addressless patrons the option of library record anonymity, entering "Jane Doe" for the patron's name, for example, in order to protect their privacy.

All of the libraries in our data set require documentation for temporary addresses, typically in the form of a written letter from a shelter. We propose that libraries reconsider this requirement due to the fact that not all addressless adults, teens, or children can provide such a letter. Not all people experiencing homelessness feel that shelters are their safest option, and may choose to live on the streets, out of their cars, at a friend's house, etc. Shelter beds are also in limited supply, and not everyone is able to get one. If they can get in, it is not always a quick process.

Children, who have no say in their housing decisions, should not be penalized because their parents chose a housing option other than a shelter, nor should they be penalized if their family is unable to be housed in a shelter.

Teens, likewise, are beholden to their parents' choices, or may have made their own decisions based on the reasoning and barriers suggested above. As we've shown, the teens in our sample are even more responsible with library materials than adults. Formal proof of temporary housing for teens is an unnecessary barrier to access for a highly engaged faction of library patrons.

Another common challenge for teens is the requirement that parents be present when issuing library cards for underage library patrons. It is difficult for many teens to arrange a time for their

parents to visit the library given their work schedules, or to have to prove to them the value of taking a trip to the library for this reason, particularly if the teen library patron is estranged from their parents or guardians. Anecdotally, the teens who are unable to fulfill this requirement to obtain their library card often do not return to the library for programs or services as a result.

We recommend that no documentation to prove a temporary address should be required for addressless library patrons seeking to obtain a library card. We thus propose to ask for documentation at first, and if they can't provide it, issue the card regardless.

We recommend that libraries post their addressless card policy on their websites and potentially within the building. We recommend that libraries promote this service in their communities, especially at local shelters, Veterans Associations, homes for youth in crisis, and local social service agencies.

The idea of State Library Cards has been suggested by many during this research process. We do recommend that these cards are created, but also recognize the challenges of implementation on this scale. If such a program is ever developed, the recommendations outlined above should be applied.

List of Library Policies

1) Newark

Addressless patrons must provide the library with a letter of temporary residents from a shelter. In the event that the patron cannot provide this information they are encouraged to use our resources on-site.

2) Monroe

What kind of documentation is needed to get issued a special card?

- We ask for a letter from the facility they are currently staying at.

Do your special cards expire? How long do they last for? How long do standard cards last for?

- It depends on the information providing from the patron

3) Bernards

*As for the cards we provide to the women in the local shelter, we do try to provide access to temporary members of the community, including the women in the shelter. **For shelter residents, we work to maintain anonymity, by using the last name "Smith" for all, and using a fake phone number. All shelter resident cards have the library's address for home address. All of these cards are good for 3 months but are renewable if the patron is still living in town.***

Per the Circ Manual, These cards are issued with a red dot and a hole punched in them. They are not allowed to place holds or JerseyCat ill requests. They are allowed to use the card at the issuing library (Bernards is part of a consortium).

4) Madison

TEMPORARY (restricted) Individuals residing temporarily at a facility such as a hospital, rehabilitation center, or shelter located within a MAIN member library's service area, may be eligible for a temporary card. Patrons with a temporary card are eligible for in-person service at the issuing library only. They may not request materials through the patron online request system; however, library staff may PATRON REGISTRATION PROCESSING 6 | P a g e place holds on their behalf. A patron code of Temporary should be entered with an expiration period of three months.

5) Morristown and Morris Township

Temporary cards are granted to residents of shelters and half-way houses in Morristown and Morris Township (see list below); they must bring a signed letter from the housing manager stating that they are currently living there and these cards are free and good for 3 months. Included in this category are patrons who are in transit, like receiving medical treatment in Morristown and Morris Township.

6) Gloucester County

GROUP HOMES / SHELTER RESIDENTS The following will be issued a 6-month limited GCLS membership with a patron profile of GCLSLMTD: Individuals residing in a group home or shelter which has stated acceptance of financial responsibility identified on request submitted in writing on organization letterhead. Organization, or designated individual, accepting financial responsibility will be identified in the 'care of' field. Individuals requesting the 6-month limited GCLS membership are to be given the form letter that the organization will need to respond to. Staff are to fill in the date of the request and name of the individual before issuing the letter. Any questions regarding the response letter are to be referred to the Branch Manager/Department Head/Supervisor. Note: shelter residents or group home residents that cannot provide a letter of acceptance of financial responsibility will not be issued a GCLS card. These residents will be issued a computer guest pass. Staff may also offer these individuals material from the used book table.

7) Elizabeth

Transient Housing and Temporary Cards New residents to the City of Elizabeth, who do not yet have identification showing a permanent address in the City of Elizabeth, may obtain an "Internet Only" card. This card can be changed to a full-service card with the required proof of permanent residency.

Persons in transient living situations, which includes both corporate housing and homeless shelters, are entitled to an “Internet Only” card that provides access to the Internet at the Library and remote access to the Library’s online resources. Users should be aware that not all of the Library’s online resources are available remotely. To obtain the “Internet Only” card, each person must produce valid identification and proof of temporary residency, such as a housing voucher, a letter on temporary housing letterhead, or similar documentation. If a person in temporary housing has valid proof of the expected length of stay on a letterhead document, a standard library card may be issued, with an expiration date of two weeks before the expected departure from the City of Elizabeth. This card will allow the checkout of a total two print items; DVDs cannot circulate on this temporary card. “Internet Only” Cards The Elizabeth Public Library allows non-residents to use the Library’s Internet computers in the same manner that Elizabeth residents use them. Non-residents not eligible for a free Elizabeth Public Library card, or those unwilling or unable to pay the annual fee for a full-service card, may apply for an “Internet Only” card that allows access to the Internet at the Library and remote access to the Library’s online resources.

8) Long Branch

For any persons who had a transitioning address, they were asked to provide a letter of residence to the library by their case manager or persons in care of. This letter had to also have the organization's letterhead, signature of the case manager and their contact information. The "addressless" patron also needed identification in order to receive a library card. Acceptable forms of identification are State issued license, Motor vehicle identification card, voters registration card, hospital I.D, report cards or school printed schedule. These cards were classified as temporary cards or TEMP cards. This account expired in 3 months and was limited to 3 checkouts at any given time. Any material is available for check out with this card. Standard library cards expire once every 3 years.

9) Plainfield

Patrons who do not have a permanent address may obtain a Plainfield library card. They must reside in temporary housing in town to obtain a temporary card that is valid for 1 year or until patron is able to show proof of permanent address. They would need to show a picture identification along with a letter from the facility in which they are temporarily residing.

- The limit of items that can be checked out is 4.
- They are not allowed to check out A/V materials.

10) Trenton

Limited library cards can be issued to individuals currently residing in Trenton but whose living situation is unresolved such as a crisis center, half-way house, or other similar circumstance. A letter from the institution may be required. These cards are issued at the discretion of the library

staff. These cards are valid for one (1) year and allow use of the library's digital services and the checkout of two (2) library items at a time.

A) Mount Laurel

Following a declared state of emergency Mount Laurel non-residents staying in Burlington County emergency shelters, with Mount Laurel residents, or as long term residents in Mount Laurel hotels may receive a three month card at no cost. Items loaned are limited to books, DVDs, CDs, audiobooks (no video games, mobile technology or Museum Passes are included). A working phone number must be listed as well as a temporary address and a permanent legal address, if available.

B) Montville

see MAIN circ policy for "temporary residents" which provides for issuing cards for patrons with no permanent local address.

C) Sussex County

For NJACP Participants: When a person wishes to obtain a library card, does not wish to show proof of residence, and states they are in the NJAC program:

1. Verify Program Participation Ask to view official ACP Card (blue laminated card) valid for 4 years
2. Use Authorized Substitute Address as applicant's mailing address
3. Set library card expiration date 2 years forward from application date, or date participation in Confidentiality Program expires, whichever is sooner
4. Set bType to ACP (adult confidentiality program) or JCP (juvenile confidentiality program) a. Specific bType is necessary to inform debt collection to proceed based on provided PO box address only

Additional explanatory details

1. Use of Substitute Address The program participant may request any public agency to use the substitute address in place of their residence, work and/or school address when they create a new record or update an existing record. Even if a program participant's residence, work or school SCLS Circulation Manual User & Procedure Guide 170 address is known to the agency for any reason, the substitute address must be used on all paper and electronic files, forms and documents.
2. Document and Maintain Confidential Records The library shall use the designated mailing address requested by the program participant on all records, databases, and correspondence, and any other materials that may contain a program participant's residence, school or work address.
3. Disclosure The library shall not disclose the participant's record unless in receipt of a written exemption determination from the Director of the Division on Women under the

provisions of N.J.A.C. 3A:71-10. Any requests for disclosure from court order, attorneys, law enforcement or other state agencies shall be referred directly to the Program Manager at the Division on Women at 1-877-218-9133.

For People Without a Permanent, Provable Address or Who Are Temporarily Experiencing Homelessness:

Those who are unable to provide proof of permanent residence can be granted limited borrowing privileges with

- Letter from a local shelter or social services agency confirming transient status (a phone call confirmation will suffice), or
- Local PO Box
 - Borrower may take out 1 item at time of application
 - Library card is mailed to PO address to confirm its accuracy

Rules for Use

- Registered as a temporary 3-month card
 - Use shelter address or PO box if available
 - If no temporary address available, use Branch address in required fields
 - Add EDC block to prevent accounts from being automatically sent to debt collect
 - Notify Assistant Library Director for tracking purposes
- Borrowing is limited to 3 active items and 3 requests at any 1 time - Enter borrower note at time of card creation BORROWER LIMITED TO 3 ACTIVE ITEMS AND 3 HOLDS
- Traditional library materials only (e.g. no iPad, laptop, etc.)
- SCLS items only (no interlibrary loans)
- Lending periods and fines consistent with existing SCLS policy

D) New Brunswick

The following is procedure following policy:

Verify patron has two forms of identification; at least one must provide their current address. Acceptable identification is current identification that establishes their eligibility. Acceptable identification includes but is not limited to rent receipt, credit card bill, lease, pre printed checks, bank statement, utility bill, valid NJ driver's license or registration, and a letter on letterhead stationery from a shelter for the homeless. Social security cards are not an acceptable form of identification. All forms of identification are subject to verification, including letters of identification.

If a patron is using a letter from a shelter for the abused, use their first name and a generic last name. Use the shelter PO Box address. Since the shelter is a temporary facility, have the card expire in three months. It is important to preserve their anonymity. Return their letter to them. If the patron does not have acceptable identification with them, ask them to return and bring proper

identification. They can be sent a postcard or empty envelope to their address to use as proof. If the patron does not have an address for this, refer them to the librarian.