



## **CITY *of* CALABASAS**

### **LIBRARY COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT**

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**DATE:           JANUARY 13, 2022**

**TO:             LIBRARY COMMISSION**

**FROM:          BARBARA LOCKWOOD, CITY LIBRARIAN**

**SUBJECT:       LIBRARY FINES**

**MEETING      FEBRUARY 7, 2022**  
**DATE:**

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#### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:**

Eliminate Library fines for overdue materials.

#### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:**

The American Library Association passed a resolution in January 2019 stating, "The imposition of monetary library fines creates a barrier to the provision of library and information services." In recent years many libraries across the United States have eliminated late fees for overdue materials. In the Southern California Library Cooperative alone, sixteen libraries, including Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles County Library and Ventura County Library have eliminated fines for overdue materials.

Going fine-free helps improve equity of access and erase barriers to Library use that disproportionately affect low-income households. When patrons begin accumulating fines and fees, they become less inclined to revisit the library. Libraries provide a significant social benefit to low-income patrons, since it allows them to access a wide variety of materials and services without having to spend additional funds.

Even patrons who can afford to pay often feel embarrassed and uncomfortable being told they have a fine. It sometimes may cause a confrontational situation for the staff which can be unpleasant or turn into a totally distressing or dangerous incident. Removing fines improves customer relations and improves staff time and efficiency.

Studies, both in public and academic libraries, show that fines don't significantly change how long an item is overdue. Research has shown that fines are not effective in getting materials returned on time, and libraries that have eliminated fines have found that long overdue items come back and patrons who avoided the library for years start visiting again. Many libraries are finding that as fines are eliminated or forgiven, older materials are being recovered.

There is an argument that fines teach people responsibility. Sarah Houghton, Director of the San Rafael Public Library, told *American Libraries* that "it is not the library's role to teach responsibility to any age group... the library's role is to encourage lifelong learning, exploration, and innovation. It is clear that going fine-free helps libraries achieve this goal, and so far it seems that patrons are displaying the same level of responsibility as before."

We will still charge fees for lost, damaged or unreturned materials. Materials are considered lost, in most cases, 30 days after two renewals and the final due date. Customers will be billed for their replacement. Once the book is returned the cost is waived. If a book has a hold it cannot be renewed and the lost book charge accrues after the first due date. Customers with an item with a billed status on their library account cannot check out additional materials from the library. Fees will still be charged for library services and products such as library card replacement, copying, printing, proctoring and non-resident study room use.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The Library stopped collecting fines during the COVID closure and saw little fiscal impact on the total budget. The Library still had a positive fund balance. In 2018, the last full year of normal operations, the Library collected \$19,000 in fines which also included study room and proctoring fees. These monies accounted for less than 1% of the total revenues of \$2,196,427.

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

Send a recommendation to the City Council to eliminate overdue fines from the annual fee schedule.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment 1: SCLC Fine free status graphic
- Attachment 2: Organizational costs of fines