



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: JANUARY 17, 2023**
FROM: RIVERSIDE PUBLIC LIBRARY **WARDS: ALL**
SUBJECT: REMOVAL OF LIBRARY FINES FOR OVERDUE MATERIALS FOR ADULTS AND JUVENILE LIBRARY CARD HOLDERS

ISSUE:

Approve the removal of library fines for overdue materials for adult and juvenile library card holders.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council approve the removal of library fines for overdue materials for adult and juvenile library card holders.

BOARD RECOMMENDATION:

On December 12, 2022, the Board of Library Trustees unanimously approved that the City Council consider removal of library fines for overdue materials for adult and juvenile library card holders.

BACKGROUND:

On August 26, 2019, the Board of Library Trustees received and filed an informational report on an article from The Mercury News (mercurynews.com) dated May 31, 2019, titled "Are Library Late Fines on the Verge of Extinction?" Written by Patrick May.

The article identified several library jurisdictions that have eliminated overdue fees for library materials including books, audiobooks, CDs and DVDs. Specifically, it focuses on the Oakland Public Library as the jurisdiction was set to eliminate fines on July 1, 2019. The article also looks at a partnership in San Francisco between the Library and the Financial Justice Project that looked at how best to assess and reform the overdue fines. In both locations one of the key findings was that fines create unequal barriers to library access within the communities served.

On November 8, 2021, the Board of Library Trustees received and filed an informational report on late fines eliminated at Los Angeles County Library and New York Public Library.

Los Angeles county stated that fines for overdue library materials were originally implemented as a source of revenue, but the fines make up a small percentage of the library's revenue. Additionally, staffing costs associated with the collection of late fees exceeded the fee revenue collected in the past two fiscal years. Other library systems such as San Diego, San Francisco, Chicago and Denver have also adopted a fine free model.

The New York Public Library introduced a fine free model on October 4, 2021, and noted it was because the potential for inequity evident among their young population. Thirty percent of blocked library cards belonged to patrons younger than 18.

On June 21, 2022, the City Council adopted the Fee Schedule.

DISCUSSION:

External studies on library overdue fees show that when customers receive a late fee, they are less likely to view the issuing agency positively and less motivated to return to the library. Additionally, the library is less likely to recover the overdue item. Studies also reveal that late fees disproportionately affect low-income households and those most in need of library services. Libraries across the United States, in California, and more locally in the Inland Empire are beginning to understand the negative impact late fees and especially higher fines have on the community. The elimination of late fees reduces patron guilt in returning materials, helps foster a better library environment, produces friendlier interactions between library staff and customers, and allows staff to focus on transformational customer experiences rather than transactional ones.

Riverside Public Library collects fines and fees at each of the eight library locations via cash or credit card transactions. Adult library cardholders are charged \$0.25 per day a book is overdue and juvenile library cardholders are charged \$0.10 per day. Library customers are allowed to maintain a balance under \$5.00 and still check out materials. If a customer's balance exceeds \$5.00, their material checkout and computer usage privileges are blocked. Accounts that have over \$50 in associated fines and fees are sent to collections via Unique Management Services Inc., for collection.

On September 20, 1996, the City of Riverside entered into an agreement with Unique Management Services Inc., to provide collection agency services for the Riverside City and County Public Library. Since this time, the Riverside Public Library has used Unique Management Services Inc., to provide collection services for customers with fines exceeding \$50.

On November 25, 2013, the City of Riverside entered into an agreement with Unique Management Services Inc., for collection services through June 30, 2018, at the rate of \$8.95 per account sent to collections.

Projected and actual revenues for overdue fees for library cardholders has decreased dramatically in recent years. For the Fiscal Year 2022/2024 Two Year Budget, the projected revenue from lost and overdue library materials is \$16,000 for FY 2022/2023 and \$14,000 for FY2023/2024, respectively.

Though the library will eliminate all overdue fines, library users will still be responsible for the cost associated with the replacement of lost or damaged books and other materials they check out. Library staff plan to return to the Board of Library Trustees and City Council with a pilot program on elimination of all library fees in Summer 2023.

On December 12, 2022, the Board of Library Trustees voted unanimously to support this item and to refer it to the City Council.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The item presented in this report contributes to Strategic Priority No. 1 *Arts, Culture & Recreation* and Goal No. 1.1 - Strengthen Riverside’s portfolio of arts, culture, recreation, senior and lifelong learning programs and amenities through expanded community partnerships, shared use opportunities and fund development.

The item aligns with each of the five Cross-Cutting Threads as follows:

1. **Community Trust** - This item aligns with Community Trust by ongoing efforts in supporting community participation and engagement for all members of the community.
2. **Equity** - This item aligns with Equity by guaranteeing that all library customers can check out library materials with the impacts of disproportionate fines for overdue items.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** - This item aligns with Fiscal Responsibility by identifying costs that will be absorbed by the general fund.
4. **Innovation** - This item aligns with Innovation as the City of Riverside will be following the best practice of overdue fine removal for library customers.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** - This item aligns with Sustainability & Resiliency by giving staff more time to focus on library programs rather than transaction-based experiences.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The total fiscal impact of this action for the loss of revenue to FYs 2022/23 and 2023/24 is estimated to be \$6,000 and \$4,000, respectively, with the removal of library fines. The loss of revenue will be offset to a small degree through the reduced administrative time and effort required to track and follow up on late material.

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