

Implementation of a Fine-Free Library for Overdue Library Books and Materials

Eliminating barriers is one of the Los Angeles County’s 2016-2021 Strategic Plan initiatives to Foster Vibrant and Resilient Communities. Its intent is for all County residents, particularly in high needs areas, to have increased access to recreational and cultural opportunities, including library services.

Collecting fines for overdue library books was originally implemented as a source of revenue and as an incentive for people to behave responsibly and return borrowed books. Overdue fines make up less than 1% of LA County Library’s revenue collection. These overdue fines block patron’s library cards and hinder families from returning to their libraries and utilizing their services.

Incurring fines and fees create a financial burden and major barrier to services on low-income families, fixed income seniors, and those struggling financially. Fines have created a disproportionate impact on vulnerable individuals, particularly youth and older adults, non-citizens, and communities of color. In addition, the staffing cost

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associated with the collection of the fees exceeded the amount collected in the past two fiscal years. Eliminating fees will provide the Library with the added benefit of redirecting staff time away from the costly burden of fee collection allowing more time for direct customer benefit.

In recent years, large urban systems across the country such as Los Angeles Public Library, San Diego Public Library, San Francisco Public Library, Chicago Public Library, Denver Public Library and Columbus Metropolitan Library, have adopted a fine-free model for all patrons. This approach has gained traction in over 200 cities and municipalities, especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Libraries that have adopted these fine-free policies have seen a growth in library card registrations and a 200 percent increase in returned materials.

With the recent re-opening of its 85 libraries, LA County Library, wishes to broaden its open-door policy and welcome back patrons that have refrained from coming to the library due to outstanding fines and fees. The implementation of a fine-free Library system offers library patrons a fresh start with an opportunity to be relieved of any financial obstacles that may prevent them from continued use of library services and positively impacts the continued use of its community libraries.

I, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

- 1) Find the proposed actions are not a project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) since they are activities that are excluded from the definition of a 'project' by section 21065 of the California Public Resources Code and per section 15378 (b) of the State CEQA Guidelines. The proposed actions are organizational or administrative activity of

government which will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment;

- 2) Instruct the County Librarian to waive fines and fees, upon Board approval, for all overdue library books and library materials returned to the Library;
- 3) Instruct the County Librarian to implement, upon Board approval, a Fine-Free Library, for overdue library books and library materials; and
- 4) Instruct the County Librarian, upon Board approval, to work with the Auditor-Controller, County Counsel and Treasurer-Tax Collector to waive all fines and fees; and write-off the Library's Account Receivable.

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JH: gc