



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Contra Costa County Library

(925) 608-7700

Contra Costa County Library is saying goodbye to fines

Beginning January 1, 2019, the Contra Costa County Library will eliminate overdue fines on all library materials. The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors voted today, Tuesday, December 11 in favor of the proposal to eliminate daily fines on overdue books, magazines, DVDs and other materials.

By eliminating fines, the library is removing barriers and making access easy, equitable and enjoyable for everyone.

“Our libraries are open for the entire community to take advantage of all they have to offer,” said Contra Costa County Supervisor Karen Mitchoff. “Saying goodbye to fines gives everyone an opportunity to restart their relationship with the library.”

Of more than 650,000 cardholders countywide, 118,450 (18%) currently have their cards blocked due to fines. Forty-three percent of youth accounts currently owe a balance and approximately 21,000 youth cards are blocked at a critical time in their lives.

“Families are staying away from the library because it’s simply too expensive for them,” said County Librarian Melinda Cervantes. “We don’t want people to have to choose between putting food on the table and reading.”

Overdue library material fines and library material replacement charges make up approximately 2 percent of the library’s revenue. Since 2013, revenue from fines and charges has decreased by 31 percent. During this same period, circulation of eBooks and other e-resources have increased 128 percent. E-resources are already fine free and benefit those with greater access to technology.

Eliminating overdue fines will also result in more positive customer interactions and allow staff to focus on creativity and exceptional service.

“We have so many outstanding and enthusiastic staff members who would much rather spend their time helping someone find the next great read or learn how to use one of our online

resources,” said Deputy County Librarian Nancy Kreiser. “They can spend more time making people smile.”

The Contra Costa County Library is the first county library in California and largest in the state to eliminate fines for everyone. The Library joins others across the country that have gone fine-free.

Patrons will still be expected to return library materials on time. Checkout periods on materials will remain the same and patrons will incur a replacement charge if materials are not returned 30 days after the due date.

For media inquiries, please contact Public Information Officer Brooke Converse at bconvers@ccclib.org or (925) 608-7713.

For general questions, please contact Library Administration at libadmin@ccclib.org or (925) 608-7700.

County Library Goes Fine-Free On Overdue Books

Bay City News Service | on December 11, 2018

1

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors this morning moved to eliminate overdue book fines at libraries in the county effective Jan. 1, citing concerns about the area's high cost of living and the number of patrons who currently have their borrowing privileges suspended because of fines.

Out of roughly 650,000 library users countywide, an estimated 18 percent of them currently have their cards "blocked," meaning they cannot be used to check out books or other materials, according to County Librarian Melinda Cervantes.

That includes 21,000 youth cards belonging to children who are unable to check out library materials during what Cervantes described as a "critical period" in their lives. Moreover, roughly 43 percent of youth who have library accounts currently owe fees on those accounts.

As soon as \$10 or more accumulates, the library blocks that user's card, which limits access to library materials and services. Accounts can also be referred to collections agencies, compounding the impacts on the account holder.

For anyone accessing the library's offerings online, such as downloading an e-book to be read on a digital device, do not incur the same kind of fees. Lower-income library users, however, may not have access to those devices.

"Those who can afford those devices already live in a fine-free world," Cervantes said. "Access to technology is an advantage."

The revenue from overdue fees and replacement costs incurred when library users pay to replace a lost item is responsible for roughly 2 percent of the library system's revenue, but that revenue from fines and charges has dropped by 31 percent since 2013.

During that same time frame, use of digital resources has increased by more than 125 percent,

No Shame. No Blame. No Fines.



(<https://www.denverlibrary.org/sites/dplorg/files/2018/12/Fine%20free%20web%20graphic.jpg>)

The Denver Public Library goes fine free.

We get it: sometimes it's hard to return materials to the library. Schedules change; work calls; it snows. In short, life gets in the way. But being fined for late returns can be frustrating enough to make people not want to borrow again from the library. We want

people to access our materials, so we set out to change the way we do business and we think you'll be pleased.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2019, the Denver Public Library will discontinue charging overdue fine penalties for late returns. We're even zeroing out most customers' existing overdue balances so they can start fresh. That means that when life gets in the way and you return items a few days late, you can do so without worrying about overdue fines. Even if you have an overdue item that prevents you from checking more items out, just return the book and you will be back to borrowing!

Why the change? Libraries are about providing access, and going fine free is one more way we're increasing access to our collections and services. Going fine free is a growing trend in American libraries, resulting in increased visits and circulation. That's music to a librarian's ears.

The Denver Public Library believes in free and equal access for all. That includes free access to books, movies, music and everything else you can check out with your library card. Access has a dividend for Denver - we all benefit from a curious and engaged community. Increasing library use and increasing material circulation is a win-win for all.

"Eliminating overdue fines is paramount to providing equitable access for all customers," says City Librarian Michelle Jeske. "Too often, fines penalize the most vulnerable families and individuals who can least afford them; we want to reverse this trend and get community members back into our buildings to use materials and enhance their quality of life and education."

So how do materials get returned?

Customers should make a habit of always returning items on or before the due date. It's not just the right thing to do, it's how libraries work. To give an extra push, customer accounts are blocked from further checkout when one or more items reach 14 days overdue. There is still a consequence for not returning an item on time, but it will not be in the form of overdue fines. Your account will be unblocked if you just get those overdue items back ASAP.

Read below if you'd like more information on going fine free. Otherwise, we can't wait to see some smiling faces we haven't seen in a while!

Fine Free Q&A

What's the difference between fines and fees?

Fines are a daily penalty assessed for late return of library items. It's telling you you're naughty, after the fact. That isn't useful and we aren't doing it anymore.

Fees are replacement charges assessed for true material loss for unreturned or damaged items and may include fees resulting from collection referral. Fees are still included as part of our return policy.

You say that many customers have had their fines forgiven. Am I included?

Overdue fines for late returns have been eliminated; however, customers who have lost or damaged materials may need to settle their account to reinstate borrowing privileges. The easiest way to find out if you have a remaining balance is to login to your library card account at denverlibrary.org (<http://denverlibrary.org>) or stop into your local branch and talk with a staff member. Please be sure to bring your photo ID or library card.

What happens if I don't return my items by the due date?

You'll be blocked from checking out more items on the 14th day overdue.

Will I be charged anything?

You won't be charged overdue fines for late returns. Keep in mind though that items are considered *Lost* on the 28th day overdue and you will be billed replacement fees for those items at that point.

I didn't really lose these items, can I still bring them back?

Yes! Please do so ASAP. Those replacement fees will automatically drop off your account and you'll be back to borrowing.

So, no matter how late I return items, I'll never be charged a fee?

Well, no. If you wait too long, your account may be referred to a collection agency. We want our stuff back so other customers can use them, too! Accounts are referred to collections on the 56th day overdue. At that point, a non-negotiable \$10 fee is assessed to cover costs we incur pursuing collection action.

Borrowing privileges may be curtailed for customers who are habitually late returning library items.

How much money did the library make from late fees?

In 2018, fine revenue accounted for \$110,339 in citywide revenue. However, fine revenue is returned directly to the city's general fund; it is not returned to the library. Library fine revenue accounts for less than 0.2 percent of all fines collected by the city.

How was the decision made to go fine free?

The Denver Public Library has never charged late fees for seniors. In 2008, we stopped collecting fines for kids materials and in 2014, for young adult materials. These actions helped remove barriers to library use and positively impacted borrowing for many customers. In 2016, we began auto-renewals for many materials, further helping customers avoid fees. In 2018, the library formally asked the Denver Public Library Commission for approval to end overdue fine collection, an item that was approved by the Commission in October 2018. The City of Denver approved the change as part of the 2019 budget process

Categories: [Library News \(/category/blog-categories/library-news\)](/category/blog-categories/library-news)

Tags: [fine free \(/category/free-tagging/fine-free\)](/category/free-tagging/fine-free) • [late returns \(/category/free-tagging/late-returns\)](/category/free-tagging/late-returns) • [library goes fine free \(/category/free-tagging/library-goes-fine-free\)](/category/free-tagging/library-goes-fine-free) • [DPL fine free \(/category/free-tagging/dpl-fine-free\)](/category/free-tagging/dpl-fine-free) • [overdue books \(/category/free-tagging/overdue-books\)](/category/free-tagging/overdue-books) • [fees \(/category/free-tagging/fees\)](/category/free-tagging/fees)

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