



San Francisco Public Library

100 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102 - 4733

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 18, 2019
TO: Library Commission
FROM: Michael Lambert, Acting City Librarian
RE: Recommendation to Forgive Outstanding Overdue Fines Liability

At the January 17, 2019 Library Commission meeting the Commission approved a [resolution](#) recommending the Board of Supervisors adopt a draft ordinance amending the Administrative Code, SEC. 8.21-2. LIBRARY FINES AND FEES, to remove overdue fines for library books and other materials. This prospective legislation will be scheduled for consideration by the Board of Supervisors as part of the FY20/21 budget process.

If the Board of Supervisors approves the proposed revisions to the Library Fines and Fees Schedule it will prevent library patrons from incurring debts related to overdue fines in the future or, in many instances, suffering the resulting loss of borrowing privileges. While this elimination of overdue fines represents a major paradigm shift for addressing equity and promoting greater access to library services, a sizable outstanding liability related to overdue fines remains on thousands of patron accounts, which can contribute to lost borrowing privileges.

The white paper, [Long Overdue: Eliminating Fines on Overdue Materials to Improve Access to San Francisco Public Library](#), found that 34.8 percent of current SFPL patrons hold library debt due to overdue fines or fees, and overdue fines disproportionately affect low-income populations, racial-minority communities and those without college degrees. Based on recent data, the Library has determined that the outstanding liability related to overdue fines is a barrier to access to 17,548 patrons whose borrowing privileges are suspended, and a financial burden to an additional 231,021 patrons who have fines but are not blocked. The table below shows the Library's total outstanding overdue fines liability by patron type.

Outstanding Overdue Fines Liability		
Patron Type	Patron Records	Amount Owed
Active Patrons		
Adult	99,647	\$ 566,079.35
Senior	12,033	\$ 30,563.11
Total	111,680	\$ 596,642.46
Inactive Patrons		
Adult	125,655	\$ 916,566.39
Senior	11,234	\$ 53,868.30
Total	136,889	\$ 970,434.69
Grand Total	248,569	\$ 1,567,077.15

A number of peer urban libraries that eliminated overdue fines opted to also write off debts related to overdue fines at the same time those libraries stopped charging for late returns of library materials.

Overdue Fine Forgiveness / Debt Write-off	
Regional Peers	
Contra Costa Public Library	Forgave all overdue fine debt
San Mateo County Library	Forgave all overdue fine debt
Berkeley Public Library	Forgave all overdue fine debt
San Diego Public Library	In process of forgiving all overdue fine debt
National Peers	
Miami-Dade Public Library (FL)	Forgave all overdue fine debt
St. Paul Public Library (MN)	Forgave all overdue fine debt (and fee debt >2 years)
Columbus Metropolitan Library (OH)	Forgave all overdue fine debt
Nashville Public Library (TN)	Forgave all overdue fine debt
Salt Lake City Library (UT)	Forgave all overdue fine debt
Denver Public Library (CO)	Forgave all overdue fine debt
Pioneer Library System (OK)	Forgave all overdue fine debt
Evansville Public Library (IN)	Did not forgive outstanding overdue fines

Recommended Action:

The San Francisco Public Library recommends forgiving all outstanding overdue debt to further address equity and access. Eliminating the overdue fine debt would restore access to five percent of patrons who have had their cards blocked exclusively due to overdue fines, which, as previously noted, disproportionately affect low-income populations, racial-minority communities and those without college degrees. Forgiveness of all outstanding overdue debt would also provide the Library an opportunity to reengage with tens of thousands of patrons with inactive accounts and invite them to resume library visits with a clean slate free of overdue penalties.

The Library Commission is respectfully requested to approve a resolution urging the Board of Supervisors to adopt the attached ordinance to forgive the outstanding liability related to overdue fines on all patrons' accounts. The Library Commission may choose to amend the resolution based on approval of any or all of the recommended changes.