



## **LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20200622-3a: Support for Equitable Access to Austin Public Library Resources**

Date: June 22, 2020

Subject: Support for Equitable Access to Austin Public Library Resources

Motioned By: Commissioner Dwyer

Seconded By: Commissioner Williams

### **Recommendation**

Support for Equitable Access to Austin Public Library Resources

### **Description of Recommendation to Council**

Requesting that the Austin City Council use their budgetary authority to make access to library resources more equitable by eliminating late fees for the return of adult library materials.

### **Rationale:**

The Austin Public Library has a commitment to equity, to assure that all members of the Austin community have equal access to Library services and programs. However, as the American Library Association and numerous public library systems around the country have recognized, monetary fines present an economic barrier to access of library materials and services, especially among low-income patrons. In a Resolution passed on January 27, 2019, the American Library Association urged libraries to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and actively move towards eliminating them.

At a time when Austinites are both facing serious economic disruption and calling on the City to invest more heavily in social services benefiting communities of color, the Austin Public Library remains a place where Austinites can seek information, services and entertainment free of charge. However, the current City policy imposes a fine on adult materials returned after their due date of \$ .25 per day / per item.<sup>1</sup> APL blocks access to library materials when a fine reaches \$10. This policy imposes a significant barrier to access to the population that needs these services the most. It is an inequitable policy.

Studies have shown that fines and late fees do not impact rates of return and may in fact discourage the return of library materials. As the ALA Resolution recognized, “there is mounting evidence that indicates eliminating fines increases library card adoption and library usage.”

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<sup>1</sup> Since October 1, 2018, the Austin Public Library has not charged fees for late returns of children’s materials. The Austin Public Library also imposes several other late fees, as reflected on the attached chart. This recommendation does not pertain to late fees on materials other than adult materials. In addition, the Commission does not recommend a change to the APL policy relating to lost or damaged items. If an item is lost or damaged, the account is billed the amount to replace it, as determined by the Library. The Austin Public Library does not accept replacement copies for lost or damaged items.

Fines and late fees contribute approximately \$250,000 per year to the City's general fund. This relatively insignificant budgetary contribution is not worth the economic barriers that it presents to the citizens of Austin or the administrative cost of collecting these fines. The valuable staff time that is taken up with processing and collecting fines would be much better spent assisting library customers and developing library programs, including the critically important job of assisting persons experiencing homelessness.

It is time for Austin to join the numerous public library systems around the country, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver, and in Texas, including Dallas, Plano, Frisco, Fort Worth, Abilene, and New Braunfels, in abolishing fines for late materials.

**Vote**

For: Chair Hanna, Vice Chair Self, Commissioners Dabbert, Dwyer, Pardo-Kaplan, and Williams

Against: none

Abstain: Commissioner Trieu

Absent: Commissioners Aguilar and Ramos

Attest:



## Overdue Charges

Overdue charges accrue when items are returned or renewed past the due date. Library materials are not due on dates the Library is closed for holidays, but overdue fines do accrue during holiday closures and days the Library may be closed.

These approved fees are part of the budget and Fee Schedule process and are the subject of a City Ordinance. Approved fees for the current fiscal year do not change fees incurred from previous years.

<b>Adult</b> materials	\$ .25 per day / per item
<b>Youth</b> materials	Effective 10/1/2018 - APL no longer charges overdue fines on Children's materials (excluding laptops) returned late.
Kill A Watt Energy Detectors, Sunlight Calculators, Digital Hose Water Meters, Wi-Fi Hotspots	\$.25 per day / per item
Holds not picked up or not canceled within the 10 calendar day hold period	\$1 per item
Laptops and Electronic Devices (in library use only)	\$5 - up to 1 hr overdue \$15 - Over 1 hr up to 2 hrs overdue \$25 - Over 2 hrs up to 3 hrs overdue \$45 - Over 3 hrs up to 4 hrs overdue \$65 - Over 4 hrs up to 5 hrs overdue