



LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20220124-5a: Eliminate Late Fees at Austin Public Library

Date: January 24, 2022

Subject: Eliminate Late Fees at Austin Public Library

Motioned By: Commissioner Smith

Seconded By: Commissioner Infante

Recommendation

Eliminate Late Fees at Austin Public Library

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting that the Austin City Council use their budgetary authority to eliminate the collection of fees for Austin Public Library materials that are returned late.

Rationale:

The Austin Public Library vision statement assures that “all members of the Austin community have equal access to Library services and programs.” But the practice of assessing fines for overdue materials presents a barrier to that vision.

Overdue fines are a regressive and unnecessary policy that most negatively impacts the Austinites in each Council District who are least able to pay. Accumulated overdue fines lead to blocked library accounts, further restricting access to libraries over what are often small amounts of money. Once users accrue just \$25 in fines, they are referred to outside collection agencies, enriching these private entities at taxpayer expense and further damaging the credit standing of our city’s residents in pursuit of an unnecessary fee.

Recognizing that late fees disproportionately affect low-income patrons, the American Library Association passed a resolution in 2019¹ urging libraries nationwide to actively move towards eliminating these fees. Studies have consistently shown that discontinuing the assessment of fines for overdue materials does not decrease return rates, and in fact may increase library card adoption and library usage. In 2019, APL eliminated overdue fines for children’s materials with no negative effects.

386 U.S. city library systems have now taken this simple and practical step to serve their populations more equitably. Among some of the larger metropolitan libraries eliminating late fees include systems in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle. Here in Texas, the public library systems in San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth and New Braunfels have stopped assessing late fees.

Users w Overdue Fees, 2018-21

COA District	APL Users with Overdue Fees
1	1,409
2	1,127
3	1,811
4	939
5	1,852
6	1,312
7	1,705
8	1,455
9	2,526
10	1,443

In light of the City's goals to increase equity and access to services, it is also time for Austin to make this change. Libraries are one of the last free public spaces open to all Austinites. Limiting their use by lower-income Austinites to maintain an outdated and unnecessary policy runs counter to APL's own equity goals and our values as a city.

¹2019 ALA Midwinter Meeting Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity.
Viewable at: <https://shorturl.at/gnyBR>

Vote

For: Chair Dabbert, Vice Chair Self, Commissioners Aguilar, Dwyer, Frierson, Infante, Marquess, Rosenthal, and Smith

Against: none

Abstain:

Absent: Commissioner Trieu

Attest:


