

# WHY SOME CALIFORNIA PUBLIC LIBRARIES HAVE GONE FINE-FREE

## **Alameda County Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** Studies have shown that library fines create significant barriers to library access, especially for families on fixed incomes and among children and teens.

## **Berkeley Public Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** The decision to end overdue fees came after the library administration and Board of Library Trustees realized that the 11,000 people blocked from taking out books because of unpaid overdue fees came from Berkeley's lowest-income zip codes — 94702, 94703 and 94710. While charging late fees had originally been meant to encourage people to return books on time, it ended up acting as a barrier to use for many, particularly those with low incomes, according to Elliot Warren, the acting director of the library. "Public libraries are the people's university and we need to make sure they are accessible to everyone," said Warren in a statement. "The current practice unintentionally tells some people they are not welcome."

## **Contra Costa County Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** 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."

## **Marin County Free Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** "To make all our services more equitable and be as inclusive as possible."

**Policy Notes:** "Items owned by other MARINet libraries such as San Rafael, Larkspur, San Anselmo, Sausalito, Belvedere-Tiburon, and Mill Valley, may still be subject to late fees."

## **Peninsula Library System**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Children and Teens Only

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** "Peninsula libraries offer an incredible array of collections, services, and events designed to help children and teens experience the joy of reading, build a love of learning, and succeed in school. Owing fines is a barrier to accessing these wonderful library activities, especially for families with limited financial resources," said Derek Wolfgram, Peninsula Library System Administrative Council Chair and Redwood City Public Library Director. "We want to make sure every child and teenager in San Mateo County has every opportunity to benefit from their local libraries," An examination of Peninsula Library System user data revealed that 13,530 juvenile library cardholders, or 11% of all juvenile cardholders, were unable to use library services due to the amount of money owed on their library accounts. While juvenile patrons make up 25% of the total cardholders in PLS, they represent 32% of all patrons with a financial block.

## **San Francisco Public Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** "Library fines are a barrier to equitable access of resources and services, disproportionately affect low-income San Franciscans, create conflict between patrons and the library, require an inefficient use of staff time and do not consistently ensure borrowed materials end up back on library shelves."

**Policy Notes:** Current suspension is temporary, and is pending approval of a permanent change by the city's Board of

Supervisors and the mayor.

### **San Jose Public Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Children and Teens Only

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** It is the mission of San José Public Library to provide equal access to information, services, and opportunities that empower, enrich, and enhance the quality of life for all. Fines are a barrier to that access.

**Policy Notes:** Pilot Program for FY 2018/19

### **San Mateo County Libraries**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** Studies have shown that late fines can be a significant barrier to library access and drive borrowers away, particularly among individuals with low or fixed incomes. Currently, 8% of all San Mateo County Libraries' 165,000 cardholders currently have their cards blocked due to fines. In our lower-income communities, the number can be as high as 19%. Furthermore, the growing research has shown that fines do not actually incentivize patrons to return materials on time.

### **Santa Barbara Public Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** "Santa Barbara Public Library's mission is to best serve its community and provide equitable access to all, and overdue fines were in opposition to this goal," Library Director Jessica Cadiente said in a press release.

### **Sonoma County Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** "Research shows that charging fines doesn't make a difference in whether people bring back books on time," said Sarah Vantrease, Public Services Division Manager for the library. "Instead, we see that fines drive people away."

### **Tulare County Library**

**Fines Eliminated for:** Everyone

**Reason for Eliminating Fines:** "County Librarian Darla Wegener reported that charging late fees is not an incentive for returning books and materials on time but actually creates a barrier for patrons."