



City of Arts & Innovation

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City of Riverside Drops Overdue Fines for Library Materials

Vote came after concern that fines could make libraries less accessible to low-income people

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Users of the Riverside Public Library system no longer will incur fines for overdue materials, following a City Council vote on Tuesday (1/17).

The change, which applies to both adult and juvenile library users, covers all materials, including books, audiobooks, CDs and DVDs. The Board of Library Trustees unanimously recommended the change last month.

“This decision eliminates the possibility that a Riverside child could see his or her library privileges revoked over a fine of a few dollars,” Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson said. “The ability for our residents to use the library for a job search or a homework assignment is worth more than these small fines.”

Previously, fines were \$0.25 per day for adult library cardholders and \$0.10 for juveniles. Cardholders whose balances exceeded \$5.00 had their check-out and computer privileges suspended. Accounts with a balance of more than \$50.00 were sent to collections.

Library Director Erin Christmas wrote in a report to the Council that fines disproportionately affect low-income people who need the library most; discourage people with overdue materials from coming back to the library; and frequently result in the loss of items that are overdue.

“It is heartening to see our City Council make this change that will ensure all Riverside residents are able to fully utilize our library system,” Mayor Pro Tem Clarissa Cervantes said. “We encourage everyone to return their materials on time, of course, but it is encouraging to see us drop this approach that can deter access to knowledge and education.”

New York, San Diego, Chicago, Denver, Oakland, San Francisco and Los Angeles County all have completed or are considering such a change.

Dropping fines in Riverside will result in a loss of revenue of about \$5,000 per fiscal year during the next two years, at least some of which will be offset by savings in staff time that would have been devoted to administering the fine system.

Library users remain liable for damaged or lost materials.