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Contacts:

Katie Woods

San Mateo County Libraries

650-556-5209

Communications@smcl.org

San Mateo County Libraries go Fine-Free

San Mateo County Libraries are kicking off the new year by eliminating all fines! Starting tomorrow, January 7th, the library system is going fine-free to ensure that all members of our community have equitable access to library books and materials.

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.

"It's important to be thoughtful about punitive measures like overdue fines. When we look at the data, it turns out they aren't effective. At the end of the day, we want to get as many books as possible into the hands of as many readers as possible," said Charles Stone, Library JPA Governing Board Chair. "This is a proud moment for all of us at San Mateo County Libraries as we continue to look for better ways to serve our community through innovative solutions and progressive policies."

The new policy builds upon previous successful initiatives implemented by San Mateo County Libraries. In July 2016, the Libraries introduced fine-free library cards for [children and teens](#) and last January, launched fine-free library cards for [seniors age 62 and older](#).

Eliminating late fines is becoming a national trend as more and more

libraries across the country are taking the leap to go fine-free. Libraries that have moved to a more customer focused policy have reported that the elimination of fines results in higher use, increased customer satisfaction, and positive interactions with the community.

Overdue library fines and fees account for less than one percent of the Libraries' revenue and the small loss in revenue will likely be offset by the staff savings associated with enforcing them.

“Eliminating fines makes access equitable for everyone and aligns with the direction and values of San Mateo County Libraries to engage all of our communities and grow a culture of learning and participation,” said Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services. “When people think of our libraries, we want them to see an inclusive place where everyone is welcome to explore, create and learn.”

San Mateo County Libraries hopes this new initiative will strengthen our communities by improving access to library programs, services and materials, and that it will welcome more people back to celebrate and enjoy their public library as a place of discovery and opportunity.

How Fine-Free Works

If you borrow material that is owned by San Mateo County Libraries (books, DVDs, CDs, audiobooks, and other materials), it will not accrue fees if it is returned after the due date. However, items [owned by other libraries in the Peninsula Library System](#) are subject to fines.

Patrons will still be expected to return library materials on time. Checkout periods on materials will remain the same and reminders will still be sent via email or a phone call. To ensure that library materials are returned, San Mateo County Libraries will continue to charge replacement fees. San Mateo County Libraries also offers easy online and mobile options for renewing materials.

About San Mateo County Libraries

San Mateo County Libraries is a Joint Powers Authority that comprises the cities of Atherton, Belmont, Brisbane, East Palo Alto, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, Pacifica, Portola Valley, San Carlos, Woodside,

and the unincorporated areas of San Mateo County. San Mateo County Libraries ignite growth through transformative experiences.

Visit smcl.org for information about our extensive digital and physical collections, twelve community libraries, Bookmobile, Lookmobile and the 12,000+ workshops, classes, concerts, readings, and other activities offered annually.

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