



To: Peter Joseph, Town Manager

From: Courtney Sparks, Library Director

Date: September 20, 2022

Re: Request to remove library late fees

Freeport Community Library has historically assessed fines to all materials returned after their due dates at \$.10/day up to a maximum of \$1.50/item. Since the beginning of the pandemic, however, FCL along with the vast majority of libraries across the country has stopped collecting late fees. Shutdowns and quarantine requirements made the assessment and collection of fines impractical, and no library wanted its users to worry about late fees when we all faced such uncertainty. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen old accounts reactivated and observed a general feeling of goodwill and support for this change from the community.

Nationwide, libraries have been discussing the elimination of fines for many years. Within the past two years, a growing number of Maine libraries, including our neighbors Curtis Memorial in Brunswick and Merrill Memorial in Yarmouth, have stopped this practice because the benefit to their communities far outweighs the small amount of revenue generated.

There are three primary arguments in favor of fines:

1. Fines are a source of revenue
2. Fines act as an incentive to return materials on time for the next user
3. Fines teach people – especially children – to be responsible for what they borrow

There are many reasons to eliminate fines:

1. The reality is that fines are not a reliable source of revenue. There are many reasons why staff decide to waive fines, and the vast majority of our users return their items on time (on average less than 1% of FCL items are overdue or billed at any given time). Overdue charges are not a dependable or impactful revenue stream.
2. Contrary to providing an incentive, fines present a serious barrier to service for families and individuals, and call into question what the primary purpose of a fine is. Fines can



discourage patrons from using the library all together. Fines do not incentivize patrons to return materials on time.

3. Fines cause financial hardship, stress, and embarrassment for the people who need our help the most – children, low-income individuals and families, seniors.
4. Fines are inconsistent with an indispensable part of our mission: to provide the public with access to information, knowledge, and personal enrichment.
5. Finally, the library is not tasked with teaching people how to be responsible. Parents can teach their children to be responsible and respectful by assisting them in returning their items on time.

The staff of FCL are requesting that the Freeport Town Council permanently adopt fine-free library services.

To be clear, we believe rules play an important role in the library. While we want to stop charging fines, lost or damaged materials are a different matter. FCL will continue to require card holders to responsibly borrow materials and reimburse the library for items lost or damaged while in their possession. It is our hope that by eliminating fines we will inspire former users to come back, support our existing patrons, and attract new users to all we have to offer.

Courtney Sparks
Library Director