

## **Our Goal: Improving Access to Your Library**

To ensure all Seattle residents—regardless of age, background or socioeconomic status—have equitable access to the Library’s collections, programs and services.

### **Why we are proposing this**

Overdue fines act as a financial barrier to Library access for many in our community. We believe communities are stronger and healthier when everyone has access to the materials they need to pursue life, career and family goals. Research shows that eliminating the practice of charging fines on overdue materials has no significant impact on return rates.

### **What this would mean for you**

You would no longer receive a daily late fine on overdue items, but you would still be responsible for the timely return of your items and payment of lost fees for unreturned items. It could also mean loss of Library privileges until the item is returned or the fee is paid.

## **Questions and answers:**

### **How do overdue fines impact Seattle residents?**

Our research shows overdue fines impact some neighborhoods more than others. While all neighborhood libraries see a similar number of late materials, there are significantly higher account balances and, as a result, more blocked patron accounts in “low opportunity” neighborhoods, as defined by the city.

### **What would stop someone from keeping books forever if there are no fines?**

Patrons would still have their borrowing privileges suspended for unreturned items and they would be charged a replacement fee.

### **Will the Library clear overdue fines currently owed?**

We are considering options, but under the current Levy proposal, there are no plans to clear currently owed fines.

### **What experience does the Library have with fine-free borrowing?**

The Library has quite a bit of experience with fine-free borrowing:

- E-materials—e-books, e-audiobooks, and streaming services—are fine-free.
- Children’s materials were fine-free from 1990 to 2009.
- Patrons who qualify for mobile service delivery are exempt from overdue fines.
- Patrons with approved ADA accommodations are exempt from overdue fines.
- We have studied the experience of over 50 U.S. fine-free library systems.

### **How do overdue fines affect the Library’s budget?**

The Library collects about \$1.1 million a year in overdue fines. That revenue helps maintain Library operations such as staffing, utilities, books and technology. This revenue has declined by \$226,363 since 2012 as more patrons use digital formats, which are fine-free. Proposed Levy funding to eliminate fines would serve as a revenue replacement for these funds.

# 2019 Library Levy Renewal Proposal Fact Sheet

## Eliminating Fines at The Seattle Public Library

### Definitions:

- **Fines:** Amount charged per item, per day for materials not returned by the due date — currently \$.25 per item, per day for most materials.
- **Fees:** Fees assessed for lost or damaged Library materials, card replacements, and interlibrary loans.
- **Blocked account:** Currently, a patron account that has accrued \$15 or more in fines and/or fees is blocked from checking out or renewing physical materials or using the Overdrive e-book collection. Blocked accounts can still place holds, use Library computers, access subscription databases, and use the Library's streaming media and learning platforms such as Freegal and Kanopy.

### Library systems in the U.S. that have eliminated fines.

- Addison Public Library, Addison, IL
- Albany Public Library, Albany, NY
- Albuquerque and Bernalillo County Public Library, Albuquerque, NM
- Algonquin Area Public Library District, Algonquin, IL
- Arapahoe Libraries, Arapahoe County, CO
- Berkeley Public Library, Berkeley, CA
- Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, OH
- Columbus Metropolitan Library, Columbus, OH
- Contra Costa County Library, Martinez, CA
- County of San Luis Obispo Public Library, San Luis Obispo, CA
- Dayton Metro Library, Dayton, OH
- Denver Public Library, Denver, CO
- Ela Area Public Library, Lake Zurich, IL
- Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD
- Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library, Evansville, IN
- Floyd Memorial Library, Greenport, NY
- **Fort Vancouver Regional Library, Vancouver, WA**
- Gleason Public Library, Carlisle, MA
- Heights Libraries, Cleveland Heights, OH
- High Plains Library District, Greeley, CO
- Hillsborough County Public Library, Hillsborough County, FL
- ImagineIF Libraries, Flathead County, MT
- **Kitsap Regional Library, Bremerton, WA**



- Milton Public Library, Milton, VT
- Monroe County Library, Monroe, MI
- Nashville Public Library, Nashville, TN
- New London Public Library, New London, OH
- Oak Park Public Library, Oak Park, IL
- Orange Beach Public Library, Orange Beach, AL
- Pickerington Public Library, Pickerington, OH
- **Port Townsend Public Library, Port Townsend, WA**
- Saint Paul Public Library, Saint Paul, MN
- Salt Lake City Public Library System, Salt Lake City, UT
- San Diego Public Library, San Diego, CA
- **San Juan Island Public Library, Friday Harbor, WA**
- San Mateo County Libraries, San Mateo County, CA
- **Sno-Isle Libraries, Marysville, WA**
- Stark County District Library, Canton, OH
- Sun Prairie Public Library, Sun Prairie, WI
- Toledo Lucas County Public Library, Toledo, OH
- Tompkins County Public Library, Ithaca, NY
- Vernon Area Public Library, Lincolnshire, IL
- Verona Public Library, Verona, WI
- Waukegan Public Library, Forest Grove, OR
- Westerville Public Library, Westerville, OH
- Worthington Libraries, Worthington, OH