



Contra
Costa
County

To: Board of Supervisors
From: Melinda Cervantes, County Librarian
Date: December 18, 2018

Subject: Discharge From Accountability For Library Patron Accounts

RECOMMENDATION(S):

AUTHORIZE the discharge from accountability the balances on Library patron accounts from the period 1995-2018 estimated to total \$5,800,100.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The estimated amount of account balances to be discharged is \$5,800,100. Of this amount 73% is the value of materials, not cash outstanding. These account balances cover multiple years from 1995 to 2018. There is no impact on the General Fund.

BACKGROUND:

The County Librarian and County Library Commission recommended changes to the library fines and charges schedule policy, entitled *Project Equitable Access*. Contra Costa County Library goals include ensuring that everyone has easy, equitable access to library services. Following a public hearing on Tuesday, December 11, 2018, the Board of Supervisors approved resolution 2018/556 adopting the new Contra Costa County Library Fines and Charges Schedule that will no longer include daily fines for overdue items.

☒ APPROVE

☐ OTHER

☒ RECOMMENDATION OF CNTY

☐ RECOMMENDATION OF BOARD

ADMINISTRATOR

COMMITTEE

Action of Board On: **12/18/2018** ☒ APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED ☐ OTHER

Clerks Notes:

VOTE OF SUPERVISORS

AYE: John Gioia, District I Supervisor
Candace Andersen, District II Supervisor
Diane Burgis, District III Supervisor
Karen Mitchoff, District IV Supervisor
Federal D. Glover, District V Supervisor

I hereby certify that this is a true and correct copy of an action taken and entered on the minutes of the Board of Supervisors on the date shown.

ATTESTED: December 18, 2018

David Twa, County Administrator and Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

Contact: Melinda Cervantes,
925-608-7700

By: Stephanie Mello, Deputy

cc:

BACKGROUND: (CONT'D)

In a recent survey of Contra Costa County Library customers, respondents overwhelming identified “Cost of Living” as the most pressing concern in their communities. The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) recently published an *Issue Brief on Advancing Racial Equity in Public Libraries*, and identified library fines as a form of “structural racism,” pointing out that people who have difficulty paying fines experience negative consequences that include being blocked from library and computer use, or being reported to a collections agency. Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries (SPELL) research reveals that library fines and fees are barriers preventing low-income families from using public libraries. Other libraries in California that have recently eliminated overdue library fines include San Diego Public Library and Berkeley Public Library.

Communities in Contra Costa County with the largest amount of uncollectable debt include Antioch, Concord, Pleasant Hill, Pittsburg and San Pablo. The impact of fines on youth patron accounts alone prevents access to library materials and perceived access to all library services; kids and parents stop using the library. Of the 132,000 registered children and teen library cards, 43% currently owe a balance on their library accounts. Approximately 21,000 youth patron cards are blocked at a critical time in their lives when they most need access.

Overdue library material fines and library material replacement charges make up approximately 2% of the library’s budgeted revenue. Since FY 2013-14 revenue from fines and charges decreased by 31%

During this same period, circulation of ebooks and other e-resources have increased 128%. E-resources are already fine free and benefit those with greater access to technology.

Contra Costa County Library’s *Project Equitable Access* resets the library’s relationship with the public, inviting people to return to the library and take advantage of all that is offered. With the elimination of late fines it's anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the circulation of library materials and the number of active cardholders.

Approval of the recommended action will allow the Library to eliminate patron account balances and to purge inactive patron account files from the Library’s computer system thereby creating an accurate inventory of patron accounts. This action will remove barriers to access, and implement Project Equitable Access.

The Library will conduct an aggressive outreach effort to current and former library cardholders through the print and broadcast media, social media, schools, outreach events and via emails to encourage all to visit their closest library, get a new library card or reactivate an expired card, and return books and other materials without penalty. *Project*

Equitable Access will offer a "fresh start" to children, teens and adults in Contra Costa County.

In accordance with Administrative Bulletin 207.7, Relief of Shortages and Account Collections, it is recommended that the Board of Supervisors approve the request to discharge from accountability the balances on Library patron accounts from the period 1995-2018 estimated to total \$5,940,000.

The Library confirms the patron account records are true and correct, and are made on patron account information within the Library's computer system. The likelihood of collection does not warrant the expense involved, nor does it support the intention of the Board of Supervisors approved Resolution No. 2018/556.

Per the Public Records Act (Protection of Library Records), (Government Code Title 1, Division 7, Chapter 3.5, Section 6267, patron use records shall remain confidential.

CONSEQUENCE OF NEGATIVE ACTION:

The Library's patrons accounts will continue to carry account balances and continue to be a barrier to access, and Project Equitable Access will not be implemented.

ATTACHMENTS

Library Account Balances