



Elimination of Library Overdue Fines

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is Sarasota County eliminating fines for overdue materials?

The library system mission statement emphasizes access to resources for all members of the community.

The Sarasota County Library System offers equal access to information, fosters lifelong learning and inspires community engagement.

Library experts have found that charging overdue fines inhibits access to library materials and services. Studies indicate that even modest penalties deter people from registering for a library card or using the library because of the risk of incurring fines. Rather than motivating borrowers to return items on time, fines act as an inequitable barrier to service, disproportionately impacting minors, students and community members with limited financial resources.

In Sarasota County, there were numerous cardholders who were unable to borrow materials from the collection. They will now be able to return to use library resources.

- 22% of total Sarasota County cardholders were blocked from borrowing because of fines.
- 24% of those cardholders were between the ages of 5 and 18.

Have other library systems eliminated late fines?

In the U.S., almost 400 libraries have adopted fine-free policies, and the number is growing every day. In Florida, the Alachua County, Tampa-Hillsborough and Miami Dade library systems have adopted fine-free policies. To learn more about the growing trend, visit:

- **Urban Libraries Council** - www.urbanlibraries.org/member-resources/fine-free-map
- **End Library Fines** - www.endlibraryfines.info/fine-free-library-map/

What are some of the advantages of a fine-free policy?

Libraries that have adopted fine-free policies found that:

- Library card registrations increased.
- Borrowing of materials increased.
- More library items were returned.
- Students returned to the library to use homework resources.
- Staff time was redirected from fines-handling to customer-focused services.

How will eliminating fines enhance library service?

Cardholders who were unable to borrow from the library collection because of overdue fines are invited back, and those without library accounts are invited to register for a card.

Library employees who previously spent 9.8% to 19.3% of work time to manage the collection of fines, will be able to devote more time to serve library users by:

- Assisting at service desks and with the use of technology.
- Assisting with the completion of online applications for jobs and government services.
- Conducting instructional sessions and presenting enrichment programs.
- Delivering outreach activities.
- Developing and maintaining the library collection.

Won't eliminating fines reduce library revenue?

Although revenue will no longer be received from payment of overdue fines, it is far more valuable to the community to increase access to library collections.

Revenues from fines have decreased consistently over recent years due to the growing demand for digital resources, which do not incur fines. Since 2008, fines revenue dropped 50%. Additionally, the value of staff time devoted to collecting fines is over seven times the revenue received.

Will people return items if there are no fines?

The public library model is based upon a trusting relationship between borrowers and a valued community resource. Library staff trusts that borrowers will return items on time, so others may use them. Other libraries have experienced an increase in return rates after the adoption of fine-free policies.

To encourage on-time returns, the number and frequency of reminder notices have increased. If library materials are not returned, the cardholder account will be blocked until items are returned or the replacement cost of the item is received.

Are the due dates for library materials the same?

Yes. The loan periods for items remain the same:

2 WEEKS	New books, DVDs and Blu-rays	4 WEEKS	Audiobooks and Playaways
3 WEEKS	Books and music CDs	8 WEEKS	Book Club Bags

Can items be renewed?

Yes. Items may be renewed up to five times as long as there are no requests (holds) for that item.

What happens if an item is not returned?

The cardholder will receive an invoice for the full cost of unreturned items two weeks after the items are due to be returned. The cardholder account will be blocked from checking out other items, requesting reserved items and accessing many digital resources. After 42 days, blocked accounts will be referred to a materials recovery agency and a \$10 service fee will be assessed.

Replacement charges and the block on the account will be removed when the undamaged item is returned, the replacement cost has been paid, or a replacement item (same format/ISBN) has been provided. The service fees charged by the materials recovery agency will remain.

What services can be accessed with a blocked card?

Patrons whose cardholder account is blocked may still access library computers and some digital resources and may participate in programs and events.

What happens to old overdue fines on cardholder accounts?

Past overdue fines have been removed from cardholder accounts. Charges for unreturned, incomplete or damaged items remain on the cardholder account.

Can patrons receive refunds for past fines payments?

No. Overdue fines paid before this policy was enacted are not eligible for refunds. The refund policy regarding "lost" items that are subsequently found and returned to the libraries remains the same.

Where can I learn more?

Visit any Sarasota County public library or call Libraries Info Central at **941-861-1110**.



To you and
your overdue
library materials.

