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Library Fines May Soon Disappear

Courtesy of Sbcounty.gov



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By **Zev Blumenfeld, Reporter** | [0 comments](#)

The San Bernardino County Library put forth a proposal eliminating overdue fees on all children's books beginning the next fiscal year.

"Our objective is to increase access to books for children and families," said San Bernardino County Librarian Michael Jimenez.

During a special San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors meeting on Feb. 25, Jimenez told the board that his department believes they can eliminate these fees without substantially impacting their revenue. He estimated that more than 1 million overdue fees on children's material, accounting for between \$140,000 and \$150,000 of revenue, are collected each year. But while this may sound like a lot, it is only a fraction of the overall fees collected by the department — a number Jimenez estimated to be between \$500,000 and \$600,000 each year.

Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford questioned what the impact of losing this amount of revenue might have on the overall health of the county library system. Jimenez responded, saying the department has found a way to increase what he called "operational efficiency" thereby avoiding a "deep impact" on the budget. He noted the amount of time librarians spend collecting each overdue fee. By eliminating the fee, librarians will have more time to perform more beneficial tasks.

Curt Hagman the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and Supervisor of the Fourth District voiced concern about the lack of incentive patrons will have to return their books. He surmised that people may simply not return their overdue books, consequently creating a problem for others to enjoy the resource.

Jimenez said that despite removing the late fee there will still be the cost associated with an item not returned after 21 days. This cost is the price of the material — be it a book or DVD.

Precedent for the elimination of fees on overdue library materials already exists. Other libraries in Southern California and across the nation have been successful in taking similar measures as the one proposed.

Supervisor Rutherford corroborated this, mentioning that city libraries in Rancho Cucamonga eliminated their overdue fees on children's material last year. Their library system created a method for people with overdue material to contribute.

"One of the other library systems in my district that has eliminated fees has put out 'guilt jars' and asked people for donations to cover what they feel they should pay for overdue [books]," Rutherford said.

Two years ago, the county library lowered their overdue fees on children's material from 25 cents to 10 cents per item, per day. Adult fees were lowered from 50 cents per item per day to 25 cents per item, per day. While Jimenez said they would eventually look toward eliminating all fees in the future, the department is proceeding cautiously.

"We're soft stepping it because we have to balance how much revenue we're going to lose," Jimenez said. "This is something we feel we can do without really impacting any of our operation."
The decision to eliminate children's fees instead of adult books was because the youth material was the highest-use area. He said that the greatest number of customers will benefit from eliminating fines on children's books and believes the effort will help to promote and spread literacy.

Should the proposal be approved, all 32 county branches will follow the policy said Jimenez. The decision will be made at a County Board of Supervisors meeting in April. If approved, the change will be implemented come July.