

San Marcos Public Library Board

625 East Hopkins • San Marcos, TX 78666

May 23, 2022

The Honorable Jane Hughson and
Members of the City Council
City of San Marcos
630 E. Hopkins Street
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Mayor Hughson and Members of the City Council:

The Board of the San Marcos Public Library would like to recommend a change to the city ordinance which governs the library. Our current ordinance (58.127h) calls for overdue fees to be established by the city council and collected on materials and equipment that are not returned on or before the established due date. Many public libraries have gone fine-free recently and it led us to consider whether fines are consistent with the primary mission of libraries – to serve the public and provide for their educational, informational, and entertainment needs. We also considered, whether this ordinance could be enforced equitably with our diverse population.

We propose removing ordinance 58.127 h. In addition, we propose editing ordinance 58.127 j to read: (j) the library director shall with the approval of the library board, determine the materials, if any, to be designated as “popular” thus subject to an overdue fee. The library director shall post notice to patrons of the materials so designated.

It is our opinion that creating a fine-free environment would improve the customer service interactions, increase the number of active cardholders, and welcome customers who may have become disenfranchised. Research shows that communities of color are more likely to be impacted by unpaid library fees.

Many public libraries, especially those with a diverse patron base, have gone fine-free in recent years. In 2019, the American Library Association approved a resolution on *Monetary Fines as a Form of Social Equity*. (link to full resolution

<https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org/aboutala/files/content/Resolution%20on%20Monetary%20Library%20Fines%20as%20a%20Form%20of%20Social%20Inequity-FINAL.pdf>)

Overdue library fees represent a very small fraction of the library’s operating budget, yet disproportionately affects communities that have income insecurity or individuals with low incomes. Most years, the library collects about \$10,000 per year in fines. This amount is about .25% of the library budget, yet it can become a barrier for children and adults in their pursuit of information and education. While some people view fines as a minor irritation, others feel the weight of money due and it drives them and their family away from the library. Late fees add up

and become insurmountable for some families when forced to choose between paying the fee or paying for basic necessities. Studies show that fines and fees exacerbate the wealth gap faced by people of color.

Looking through a "lens of equity" we would respectfully ask that the city council direct our library staff to initiate a fine-free policy for the betterment of our community.

Sincerely



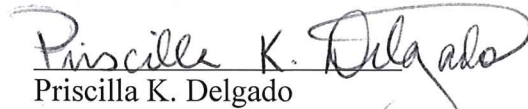
Stephen S. Beck



Kate Cargill



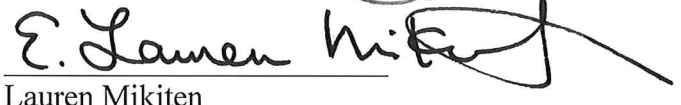
Stephanie Daniels



Priscilla K. Delgado



Geneva Gano



Lauren Mikiten



Ann Whitus, Chair Person

Enclosures

cc: Stephanie Reyes, Interim City Manager
Joseph Pantalion, Assistant City Manager
Laurie Moyer, Assistant City Manager