



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Library Board
From: Rebecca Hine, Chief Librarian
Date: Wednesday, November 10, 2021
Subject: Fine Free Library Service

Background:

Wellington County Library has not collected late fines throughout 2021 due to Covid. This is because of restrictions on patrons being able to enter our branches in order to pay fines as well as being an appropriate response to the fragile financial state many in our community find themselves in. In April 2021, a member of the Library Board asked us to consider a permanent fine free model. At that time, it was decided that we would remain fine free due to continued pandemic restrictions and that the Chief Librarian would monitor the results other library systems using this model and would provide feedback to the Library Board.

Over 40 library systems in Ontario have adopted the fine free model and it has been consistently demonstrated that the positive effects far outweigh any negative. Going fine free permanently provides us with an opportunity to reconnect with the core values of library service. Providing equal access to information is at the heart of what we do. Doing away with late fees has been gaining huge momentum across Ontario, and all of North America. This link provides a list of libraries who have gone fine free across Canada [Fine Free Libraries in Canada \(librarianship.ca\)](https://www.librarianship.ca/fine-free-libraries-in-canada). The list includes Guelph, Kitchener, Cambridge, Hamilton and Halton Hills.

Looking at the impacts of not charging fines over the past few years, as reported by library systems and professional associations, it seems that libraries are seeing only positive results. The following benefits have been identified by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries.

- #1: Librarians and staff can provide better service to patrons
- #2: Being fine free is more aligned with the mission of the library
- #3: Libraries are seeing an increase in items being returned
- #4: Libraries can make better use of their resources
- #5: Eliminating fines leads to a renewed appreciation of the library, providing good PR and an uptake in people coming back to use our services

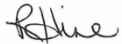
Research confirms that fines do not promote the timely return of library materials. In fact, many libraries have seen an increase in returned materials after going fine free as the stigma of owing money and the inability to pay resulted in patrons not bringing items back. Library fines disproportionately affect the members of the community who are most in need of library services and by eliminating this barrier, libraries see an increase in circulation, memberships and items being returned. One example often cited is Chicago Public library who introduced this policy in 2019 and saw a 240% increase in the return of materials and an additional 400 more library card renewals over the same time the previous year.

Late fees are a very small percentage of the operating budget at .8% and are not a sustainable source of revenue as the use of digital content continues to grow. Digital content does not generate fines as those materials are automatically returned when due. The absence of late fees does not do away with patrons being billed for lost and damaged items. They will continue to be billed for items not returned and accounts will be blocked from further checkouts if overdue items are on the account and have not been returned as is our current practice. Overdue emails will continue to be sent out reminding people to bring their items back. Patrons are still responsible for the library materials they borrow.

Recommendation:

That Wellington County Library permanently remove late fees for library patrons effective January 1, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RHine", is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Rebecca Hine
Chief Librarian