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Library Eliminates Fines for Overdue Materials

Overdue fines were made history by an unanimous vote of the Trustees of the Morrill Memorial Library when they approved a revised borrowing policy at their meeting this past Tuesday evening, December 14. This policy change removes barriers and increases access to the library's resources.

"We are proud to join the national movement to eliminate library late fines and the equity imbalance they can create," said Library Trustee Chair Sarah Begg. "The Morrill Memorial Library provides vital resources to the Norwood community. By removing this barrier to access, we are ensuring that these are accessible to everyone."

At the beginning of the Covid-pandemic the Morrill Memorial Library stopped collecting overdue fines. For many years Norwood's senior citizens have enjoyed fine-exempt status. Many other libraries in the Minuteman Library Network have also eliminated overdue fines for all borrowers, as have the Boston Public Library, the New York Public Library, and many others.

"I have to be honest, I have already been a beneficiary of the program during its trial period and I am thrilled Morrill Memorial Library is making this change permanent. " Norwood General Manager Tony Mazzucco proudly shared.

Historically less than one percent of the library's annual revenue came from overdue fines. In recent years this has been more than offset by the library's revenue from passport fees, which the Federal Government mandates be collected. The library is very happy to be an official U.S. Passport Application Service Center and make these services available in a friendly and welcoming environment that is open at hours when other passport service centers typically are closed.

Research has shown that collecting overdue fines is expensive and ineffective at getting people to return items to the library faster. Libraries that have eliminated fines get materials back at the same rate or even faster. The Morrill Memorial Library will continue to email overdue notices and charge borrowers for items not returned. When the Salt Lake City Public Library eliminated fines their late-return rate dropped five percent. The average number of days an item was overdue dropped 42% after the Vernon (Illinois) Public Library eliminated fines.

“We know busy parents who have told their children they can’t check out books because they don’t know when they will be able to return to the library and are afraid of getting charged late fines” reported Library Director Clayton Cheever. “People with limited economic means are most adversely impacted by fines that many of us would consider trivial and insignificant. That’s why we’ve been happy to waive fines for seniors for so long. I’m very grateful our Trustees have voted to eliminate this barrier for everyone”.

For more information, please contact:

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