

CITY OF OAKLAND  
AGENDA REPORT

FILED  
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
OAKLAND

2007 SEP 13 PM 3: 54

TO: Office of the City Administrator  
ATTN: Deborah Edgerly, City Administrator  
FROM: Oakland Public Library  
DATE: September 25, 2007

**RE: Resolution Authorizing The City Of Oakland To Adopt A "Forgiveness Campaign" That Targets Youth And Families With Long Outstanding Fines And Fees During The Weeks Of January 13-31, 2008**

---

## SUMMARY

This report recommends the adoption of a "Forgiveness Campaign" on Library fines and fees (excluding the Tool Lending Library) during the weeks of January 13-31, 2008. The amnesty & past fine forgiveness program is for all borrowers, however, its aim is primarily to encourage youth and families to come back and enjoy the many resources of the Oakland Public Library.

The Forgiveness Campaign (theme: **Get A Fresh Start!**) includes a component to reinforce with library users the importance of caring for and returning library materials, as well as a public relations piece about the many offerings of the Library. The "Forgiveness Campaign" will occur from January 13-31, 2008. The forgiveness will be triggered by:

1. A patron coming to the library to return overdue materials in person or putting the materials in a bookdrop; or
2. A request from a patron asking for removal of fees for lost materials.

## FISCAL IMPACT

Once a patron's record exceeds \$12.50 in fines and fees (lost book charges), their library card is "blocked" or prohibited from checking out materials. Currently, close to 94,000 registered borrowers are blocked from borrowing. The Library estimates that Oakland youth make up approximately 30% of the blocked cards. The record of blocked cards goes back to the year when the Library began to electronically record its checkouts and patron records (1998). At the same time, from 1998 to present, over 112,000 Library patrons owe the City \$3,984,951 in overdue fines and lost book charges (fees). Based on the age of the outstanding debt (up to 18 years) and experience of staff, Library administration estimates that 75-80% of the \$3.98 million debt is unrecoverable.

Amnesty Experience: Based on the last amnesty period held by the Library in 2002, a total of \$120,000 in fines and fees was cleared from patron records over a 14-day period. Based on that experience, the Library expects that an 18-day forgiveness campaign will forgive approximately \$154,000 of the \$3.98 million in total outstanding debt.

Item: \_\_\_\_\_  
Life Enrichment Committee  
September 25, 2007

FY 2007-08 Revenue Impact: During FY 2006-07, the Library collected an average of \$550 per day (excluding 12 City holidays) in fines and fees for overdue materials. Therefore, based on the FY 2006-07 daily average, the Library estimates that at least \$10,000 in FY 2007-08 anticipated fines and fee revenue will not be collected during the 18-day forgiveness campaign. Depending upon its success, that number could be considerably higher.

Total Amnesty Implementation Cost: The direct cost for the amnesty (approximately \$2,000) includes the cost of printing flyers and banners and other explanatory information. Including the minimum \$10,000 in fines and fees that the Library anticipates will be forgiven, the anticipated minimum cost of this forgiveness campaign is estimated to be \$12,000. However, these costs are estimates because it is impossible to predict the financial impact of the proposed fine amnesty with certainty.

## **BACKGROUND**

The last general amnesty that the Library had for the public was in January, 2002. That amnesty targeted Oakland children and teens and the intent was to remedy their loss of access to library materials caused by overdue fines & fees attached to their library cards. Close to 6,000 patrons had their records cleared of \$120,000 in overdue fines & fees during this period, with children and teens making up close to 45% of the total.

Once again, in order to address the loss or late return of library items by a preponderance of youth younger than 18, the Library has developed a "forgiveness campaign" that will be a general amnesty, excluding the Tool Lending Library, but targeted at children and teens. Specifically this means that during this two-week period:

- Anyone who returns overdue books – no matter how long overdue they are – will not incur fines for these materials.
- Anyone who asks for amnesty for past fines and fees will receive it. This will include fees for lost or damaged materials

The Forgiveness period is an effective way to make public library resources available to youth who hold "blocked" library cards due to outstanding fines and fees. A blocked card means they cannot borrow materials from the library, or use the library's computers. Young adults (ages 14-18) own approximately 30% of these blocked library cards. The purpose of fines and fees is to encourage the return of library materials. The forgiveness program will reinforce the Mayor and City Council's priority of supporting youth in Oakland. The library does not want overdue fines ever to discourage library users from accessing library services.

The reason that the Oakland Public Library is excluding the Tool Lending Library from this general amnesty is that there can be, and has been, a significant dollar value of items that are not returned on an annual basis. Items not returned have ranged in value from \$100 to \$350.

## KEY ISSUES AND IMPACTS

Based on the age of the outstanding debt and the experience of staff, we believe that 75-80% of the \$3,984,951 debt is unrecoverable. However, the existence of the fines and fees on the borrower's record ensures that the patron cannot use the materials and services of the Library. This includes use of the libraries computers for internet access or word processing. As 25% of Oakland residents rely on the Library for computer use, this considerably affects their ability to accomplish what has become a regular part of life.

Factors contributing to the high number of blocked youth library cards include:

- Adult items checked out on children's cards by family members (these adult materials carry fines, whereas children's materials do not.) Our cards do not identify the holder as a child or adult, so family members with blocked cards often use other family member's cards to take out their own materials.
- Changing lifestyles for children and the adults in their lives (frequent moving, storage of belongings, adaptation to changing family structures);
- A reliance on adults for transportation (and therefore the return of library materials) among our youngest library card holders'
- Books checked out during class visits not returned by individual children; and
- Many families' inability to pay even a small overdue fine, which leads to their allowing small charges to accumulate over time to an amount that causes blockage.

The cost of the forgiveness period (18 days) and the excused fines and fees is an investment in the youth of Oakland and their families. Since a major goal of the forgiveness program is to welcome families and youth back to the Library, a patron's coming to the Library to return overdue materials or request waiving of fees for lost materials (excluding Tool Lending Library) will trigger the forgiveness; it will also apply to those library patrons who drop off overdue materials in the Library bookdrops.

When the Library patron visits the Library during this time to request reinstatement, he/she will also be given an information packet about the programs, services and materials that are available at the Library, and the importance of caring for library materials.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The "Forgiveness Campaign" with the theme "**Get A Fresh Start!**," will run for 18 days, from January 13-31, 2008. Advance publicity will include notice to the Oakland Unified School District for notification by email and on the OUSD and Student Websites, to students and parents, and will also consist of posters, banners, flyers, messages to neighborhood yahoo groups, as well as editorials or Op Ed piece in local media. Education as to use of the library and care of library materials will also be provided to Oakland Unified School District staff for distribution to students. Promotional materials will include tips on care of library materials and responsible use of library cards.

The Library will ensure that all staff is well-informed and trained on clearing patron records, welcoming patrons back, and providing promotional information about the Library. Library information packets, bookmarks, or cards will spotlight the Library's newest offerings, including programs, downloadable books, and Internet access.

During the forgiveness period, any person with a blocked card, who comes to the Library and identifies themselves to staff, will have their records cleared on the spot, will be given a new Library card, and will be able to check out materials the same day.

After the forgiveness period is completed, Library staff will tally the number of returnees, materials returned, new cards issued and children and teen participants, to determine the success of the program.

### **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

In developing this forgiveness program, the Oakland Public Library is attempting to provide, to its full range of users in differing socioeconomic groups, equal access to all library materials. In such fashion, any patron, for any reason, who requests that fines and/or fees attached to their library card be "forgiven" will, once again, have full privileges to access all resources of OPL.

### **DISABILITY AND SENIOR CITIZEN ACCESS**

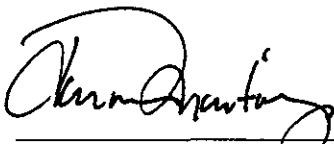
This report does not directly impact disability or senior access, except as it may apply through forgiveness of fines and/or fees.

### **RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

Staff requests that City Council accept the resolution authorizing the City of Oakland to adopt a "Forgiveness Campaign" during the weeks of January 13-31, 2008 that targets youth and families with long outstanding charges.

Respectfully submitted,

APPROVED AND FORWARDED TO THE  
LIFE ENRICHMENT COMMITTEE

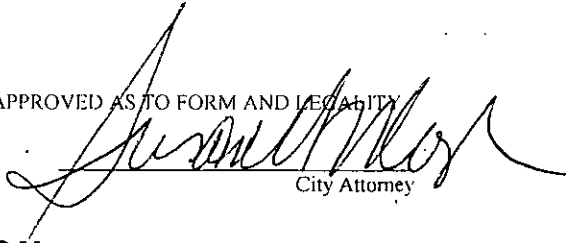
  
CARMEN L. MARTINEZ  
Library Director

  
OFFICE OF THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR

Prepared by:  
Gerard G. Garzón  
Deputy Director

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
OAKLAND

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY



City Attorney

2007 SEP 13 PM 3: 54

# OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_ C.M.S.

INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER \_\_\_\_\_

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE CITY OF OAKLAND TO ADOPT A  
"FORGIVENESS CAMPAIGN" THAT TARGETS YOUTH AND FAMILIES WITH  
LONG OUTSTANDING FINES AND FEES  
DURING THE WEEKS OF JANUARY 13-31,2008**

**WHEREAS**, the Oakland Public Library is a valuable educational resource for all, and especially for school children and their families; and

**WHEREAS**, the Oakland Public Library has received encouragement from the City Council Life Enrichment Committee to develop programs that benefit the youth of Oakland; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Oakland's Mayor and City Council have adopted FY 2007-09 Goals that address providing opportunities for Oakland youth; and

**WHEREAS**, approximately 28,000 blocked library cards are attributable to Oakland youth and prevent access to the many resources of the Library; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED:** That the City Administrator or her designee is hereby authorized and directed to adopt a Forgiveness Campaign that targets youth and families with long outstanding charges during the weeks of January 13-31, 2008.

IN COUNCIL, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, \_\_\_\_\_, 2007

PASSED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES-BROOKS, BRUNNER, CHANG, KERNIGHAN, NADEL, QUAN, REID, AND  
PRESIDENT DE LA FUENTE

NOES-

ABSENT-

ABSTENTION-

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_

LATONDA SIMMONS  
City Clerk and Clerk of the Council  
of the City of Oakland, California