

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE September 18, 2023

TO Honorable Chair and Members of the Quality of Life, Arts, & Culture Committee

SUBJECT **“The Big Read Down” Fee Amnesty Program**

To create more equitable access to library materials and services, the City Council adopted Resolution 19-0772 on May 22, 2019 to amend Chapter 24 of the Dallas City Code to eliminate library fines for late items. Additionally, to limit further access to materials pending their return, the City maintained fees for the replacement and cataloging of lost or damaged items, but the resolution allows for fee amnesty events to defray or eliminate those fees.

Dallas Public Library will conduct its semiannual fee amnesty program called “The Big Read Down” from October 1 – 30, 2023. During this period, library customers may log minutes read as well as other activities, such as signing up for library e-materials or participating in a library program, to earn amnesty for accrued fees. The Library has set the value of minutes read and activities completed in alignment with other large urban libraries with similar programs and will utilize our summer reading platform to track success.

The schedule for the fee amnesty program will be as follows:

- 15 minutes read = \$1.00 toward fee amnesty
- Activities completed = \$17.00

Library card holders can read to reduce their own fees or donate toward the fees of others. Minutes read that are not applied to the user will be banked for use toward fee amnesty at the discretion of Library managers. Banked minutes will be distributed to each branch library based upon the poverty rate in that area. This will make it possible to forgive library fees in cases involving lower income families and individuals, and therefore making access to library services more equitable to all.

After updating our system, the Dallas Public Library has over 641,000 active library card users. More than 16% of our library card holders are currently blocked from checking out materials due to fees. During the March challenge 456 people signed up and 381 actively participated reading a total of 188,261 minutes. From this group 50 people read to work off their own fees while the remaining 331 read for others. This is 161 more participants than last year’s fall challenge.

All together these readers earned \$39,819.36 toward fee forgiveness, which is more than double the amount earned last year’s Read Down. The Library will continue to follow in the footsteps of library industry pioneers such as the Los Angeles County Public Library that allows patrons to participate in a reading challenge to lower or eliminate fees on their accounts. By offering an opportunity to pay off these fines non-

DATE September 18, 2023
SUBJECT **"The Big Read Down" Fee Amnesty Program**
PAGE **#2 of #2**

monetarily, the Library has the potential to welcome back library card holders that are blocked from borrowing materials.

Please contact me or Jo Giudice, Director of the Dallas Public Library, for further information.



M. Elizabeth (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira
Assistant City Manager

c: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
Tammy Palomino, Interim City Attorney
Mark Swann, City Auditor
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