

FINE FREE MV

{No more late fines at Martha's Vineyard Libraries}

Starting January 1, 2020, all six Martha's Vineyard libraries will eliminate overdue fines for materials. All past overdue fines for island patrons will be waived, allowing for a fresh start to the new year. Waiving past overdue fines will impact 7,374 Martha's Vineyard library cardholders.

All island libraries are committed to providing equal access to every member of our community. By waiving existing overdue fines, our goal is to remove barriers and make access to our libraries easy, equitable and enjoyable for all.

BACKGROUND

The goal of eliminating late fines at island libraries was set by the six library directors almost a year ago at a Martha's Vineyard Library Association meeting. Since then, each library has worked toward making this goal a reality. The process included advocating with CLAMS (Cape Libraries Automated Materials Sharing), a network of over 35 libraries on the Cape and Islands, to let Vineyard libraries operate under their own set of loan rules. Directors also sought and received unanimous support of the governing boards of all island libraries. (The CLAMS network will evaluate this initiative as a possible precursor to additional libraries on the Cape following suit.)

This fall, CLAMS also added the convenience of allowing up to three automatic renewals for eligible materials. Existing check-out periods for all library materials will remain, but fines will no longer accrue if items are not returned by the due date. However, existing fees related to lost or damaged materials will remain in effect. If an item is never returned to the library, patrons will still be held financially responsible for replacing it.

The Vineyard libraries will join over 450 libraries across the U.S. in eliminating overdue fines. The Martha's Vineyard Library Association strongly believes in providing access to information for everyone, and that eliminating overdue fines will support our libraries' core values of providing equitable service, fostering early literacy, and maintaining free access to information.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CLAMS LIBRARY CARDHOLDERS?

- **No more daily late fines** will be charged on overdue items at any Vineyard library
- **All existing overdue fines from all accounts will be cleared** on January 1, 2020, giving everyone a fresh start.
- **Hundreds of patrons will have their accounts unblocked**, which will enable them to once again use library services. Libraries previously blocked accounts with overdue fines greater than \$25.
- **No more fine-related restrictions will be placed on use of public computers or access to digital materials** (eBooks, digital audiobooks, online databases and resources), even for people who had extensive late fees on their accounts.
- **CLAMS** member libraries off-island support the Vineyard's move toward fine-free library services, and will continue to share library items through interlibrary loan.

FINE FREE MV: FAQs

What does “Fine Free MV” mean?

Starting January 1, 2020, Martha's Vineyard Libraries **will no longer charge late fines on overdue materials**. Patrons will still be responsible for paying for the replacement costs of lost or damaged items, however.

Previously when you checked out an item and didn't return it by the due date, daily fines started accumulating. For some patrons, the growing amount could become burdensome. Under the Fine Free policy, **borrowed items still have due dates**, and patrons are encouraged to return them on time. Libraries will still send reminders to bring back books, CDs, DVDs, etc.

An item is officially categorized as overdue the day after its due date, but with the new Fine Free policy, that due date will not be associated with a punitive price tag. If something hasn't been returned by two weeks after its due date, it will be considered lost, and **the system will apply a lost item fee to the patron's account to cover the cost of replacing the missing item**. However, as long as the item is returned in good shape, patrons won't ever be charged overdue fines. If a patron eventually finds and returns the outstanding materials, the lost item fee will be erased from their account. **The largest group who will benefit from this new change will be families with children.**

Why remove late fines?

The main goal is to remove obstacles and improve access to information and services for everyone. Research and experience from libraries around the country increasingly show that fines are often barriers preventing people from using the library and its services – especially those who most rely on those services. We want to remove those obstacles, end the stress and stigma of owing fines, and ensure that all members of our community can use our libraries.

Late fines, no matter how small, can be a very real burden for individuals, families, and children. What starts as a tiny overdue fine can snowball into a larger amount with each day that an item isn't returned. As fines grow, patrons may avoid coming back to the library altogether. For many, this means they can't access books for schoolwork and other vital materials, or use essential services such as public computers or job resources. **Island libraries would rather welcome patrons back than have them stay away because they owe late fines.**

What about the late fines currently on my account?

When we launch this new policy, everyone will get a fresh start.

Existing overdue fines for ALL our patrons will be cleared from all Vineyard patron accounts on January 1, 2020. After this date, all overdue materials will fall under the new Fine Free policy.

The Fine Free policy applies only to overdue items. **If a patron currently has fees related to lost or damaged materials, those remain in effect.**

Aren't late fines part of fundamental library service expectations?

Not anymore. While overdue fines are traditionally associated with borrowing materials from libraries, that is changing. Libraries in many communities recognize that overdue fines sometimes do more harm than good when it comes to connecting people with important resources, so they're reevaluating borrowing policies and making changes to evolve with the times. The MV Libraries will be joining over 450 other U.S. libraries in eliminating late fines.

But will people return materials on time without late fines?

Interestingly, libraries that have eliminated late fines have found that return rates actually go up. By removing the threat of daily accumulating late fines, people are less likely to avoid returning to the library, and more likely to bring back any overdue items they've checked out. No late fines means more people using the library.

Can a patron hold onto a library item indefinitely?

No. Patrons still have to bring back what they borrow – and we still ask that they try to do so on time – but the Fine Free policy is much more lenient if they miss a due date. After a few attempts to ask the patron to return the item, the patron will be billed for it.

Don't the libraries need to charge late fines for revenue purposes?

Overdue fines contribute only a small amount of revenue. While our libraries are always carefully watching the bottom line, any loss of overdue fine revenue is small compared with the good this new policy will do for the community. **A Fine Free policy opens our doors wider for Islanders who need us the most.**

How does having lost or damaged item fees on my account impact my ability to use library services?

While we are eliminating late fines, libraries will still charge fees for lost or damaged materials. These fees are necessary to buy replacement books, CDs, or DVDs in our collections so other patrons may use them. As before, when a patron loses a book, CD, DVD or other library item, their account is **blocked**. That person then **cannot borrow any additional materials**. The account is unblocked when the items are returned or the replacement fees are paid.

Previously, CLAMS cardholders on island could borrow materials from Cape libraries that are not fine-free. How does the Fine Free MV policy impact their ability to borrow items?

Interlibrary loan will not be affected. The CLAMS Board has agreed that Vineyard libraries may continue to borrow library materials from off-island CLAMS libraries even without collecting overdue fines. CLAMS cardholders will not be charged overdue fines at any Vineyard library, but a Vineyard CLAMS cardholder may still be charged overdue fines if they visit a CLAMS library on the Cape.

In the past, Island libraries have promoted Food for Fines events to support the Island Food Pantry. What will happen now?

The libraries will continue to collect food and advocate ongoing support for the Island Food Pantry. In the meantime, when **Rockland Trust** learned about island libraries eliminating overdue fines and libraries' connection to the Food Pantry through the Food for Fines program, they pledged to donate \$500 to the Island Food Pantry this winter.