

February 19, 2020

LIBRARY AND EARLY EDUCATION
COMMISSION

Dear Honorable Mayor and City Council:

On behalf of the San José Library and Early Education (SJLEE) Commission, I would like to thank you for your continued support of the San José Public Library System and the many essential services it provides to our community.

As the Commission that oversees the work of our libraries and early education in San José, we especially appreciate your support for the Library to better serve adult literacy students through Partners in Reading and teens through SJ Aspires, continued support for the Career Online High School program, enhance access to international language materials and unique historic and cultural collections, provide developmentally appropriate materials and programs for young children and students through the Education & Digital Literacy Initiative and create the two-year Juvenile Fine-Free Materials pilot which you first authorized in 2018-2019 and continued into 2019-2020.

The mission of the San José Public Library is to enhance lifelong learning for all members of the community. With this in mind, the SJLEE Commission respectfully asks the Council to support the following priorities in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2020-2021:

- Annualize the Juvenile Fine-Free Materials program and expand to include Fines-Free for all Materials;
- Approve the positions related to the Education & Digital Literacy Initiative; and
- Consider expanding service to 7-days a week, offering access on Sundays at branches based on an equity analysis process.

The Commission is grateful for the Mayor and City Council's action to fund the Juvenile Fine-Free Pilot program for 2018-2019 and the continuation into 2019-2020. We again want to emphasize the importance of decoupling Library fines and fees from revenue. The Library's youngest users may benefit the most from the many educational opportunities the Library provides. However, Library fines and the fear of accruing them often keep children and parents from using the Library, and schools from partnering with the Library to distribute Library cards. These assertions were born out during the pilot phase, as Library staff have reported that the number of juvenile and teen cardholders has increased 25% in the Fiscal Year 2017-2018 comparison to Fiscal Year 2018-2019, and that the number of juvenile and teen card holders that are checking out material has increased 20% in the same time period. Additionally, the burgeoning partnerships between school districts and the Library to issue library cards to all students is significantly impactful not only to our students, but also to the school and educational networks that support our students. Libraries in the Bay Area that have already gone completely Fines-Free included San Francisco, Oakland, Alameda County, San Mateo County, Contra Costa County, Berkeley Public, Marin County, and Sonoma County. More than 180 library systems across the United States have gone Fines-Free. It is possible that in the near future we may be significantly closer to living in a City where a majority of the 250,000 residents under the age of 18 have a library card thanks to this program change and your leadership. Due to the success of the Juvenile Fines-Free Pilot program we support the annualization of the Juvenile Fines-Free and expanding the program to include Fines-Free for all materials. The Commission believes that the impact and benefit is well worth the forgone revenue from late fines as fines free reduces barriers and supports the Library's strategic priorities of enhancing access to library services, resources and programs by providing opportunities for customers to eliminate their fines and regain access. This approach directly aligns with the City's equity-based approach to the 2020-2021 budget.

The Commission is also thankful for the City Council's unanimous support and approval of the Education and Digital Literacy Initiative, which was approved in May 2018. The Digital Inclusion Fund, approved by City Council at the February 12, 2019 meeting, included one-time funds that were utilized to fund one staff member to develop Digital Literacy program quality standards, assessment framework, and performance measurement. Additionally, in Fiscal year 2019-2020 the Library has two staff members that support the Education and Digital Literacy Initiative with inclusion and equity review of existing and new Library programs. With these positions coming to the end of their initial term, it's important that the City create and fund permanent positions that will allow for the continued development and implementation of those initiatives without impacting Library operations.

The Commission respectfully requests that the City Council consider funding the expansion of Library hours to 7 day a week service at branches based on an equity analysis process. Opening the Library to the public on Sunday fills a community need for greater access to Library programming and materials. In a survey, residents cited the opportunity to visit the Library on Sunday as the most favorable time to expand hours, ranking ahead of earlier or later operational hours during the work week. Operational hours of 12:00pm – 5:00pm or 1:00pm – 6:00 pm on Sunday would provide greater access to learning, educational materials and technology, and enhance the equity of services throughout the community. Expanding services to 7 days a week is a worthwhile investment.

The Commission appreciates that budgeting is a values-based action, which takes considerable balancing and fiscal responsibility. Nevertheless, the priorities submitted above make a significant impact toward realizing a vision that advances education and self-sufficiency, and leverages a vibrant, culturally relevant community asset. In the most recent resident survey, Public Library Services in San Jose were ranked second in terms of quality of government services, which is a reflection of how much the residents value the services received by the Library. Imagine a community where every child had a library card and could attend programs or do their homework with their family each and every day of the week, regardless of where they live or the barriers they and their families face on a daily basis.

We appreciate your consideration of the importance of our public libraries and the benefits they offer when prioritizing the City's budget for the coming fiscal year.

Thank you for your vision and leadership.

Best Regards,



Michael Melillo

Commission Chair

On behalf of the San José Public Library and Early Education Commission