

# RESPONSE TO LIBRARY ADVISORY BOARD PETITION FOR A FINE-FREE LIBRARY

Susan Brown, Director  
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Recognizing that the Town Council is committed to social equity, and recognizing that the Board has considered this issue over multiple meetings and agrees with the American Library Association that Library fines represent a social equity issue, we present this petition for your review. Please find below several reasons that have led the Board to this recommendation.

First, while the initial motivation for library fines was well-considered, over time those same fines have become a barrier to equal access to Library materials. Fines have a disparate effect on citizens who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, by limiting borrowing privileges and access to those who cannot pay overdue fines.

## Library Advisory Board Petition to Council

10/30/2019

Second, fines represent a meager portion of the Chapel Hill Library and total Town budget, limiting the impact of moving to a fine-free model. In fact, revenue from fines at the Library has dramatically decreased over time. Cities moving to the fine-free model are seeing a neutral financial impact, along with increases in circulation and library usage, as well as an improvement in the morale of Library staff<sup>1</sup>.

Third, we offer that the fine-free model is being adopted by both national and North Carolina libraries, because fundamentally, fines do little (if anything) to deter people from returning Library materials late. New York, Chicago, Detroit and many others have moved to the fine-free model. Within in our own state, Wake, Hickory, Robeson County and Gibsonville are already (or about to be) fine-free. Libraries across the country have found that late fees and fines are not incentives to bring materials back but do serve as major barriers to access. These same libraries who have gone fine-free have seen a positive impact on borrowing.

# LIBRARY ADVISORY BOARD PETITION

- ✓ Fines as social equity issue
  - American Library Association (ALA) statement
- ✓ Fines as barrier to access
  - Disparate effect on economically disadvantaged
- ✓ Fines as small portion of overall budget
  - Decreasing revenue from overdue fines
- ✓ National and state trend of fine-free model
  - Ineffective as incentive/disincentive
  - Impact of adopting fine-free model

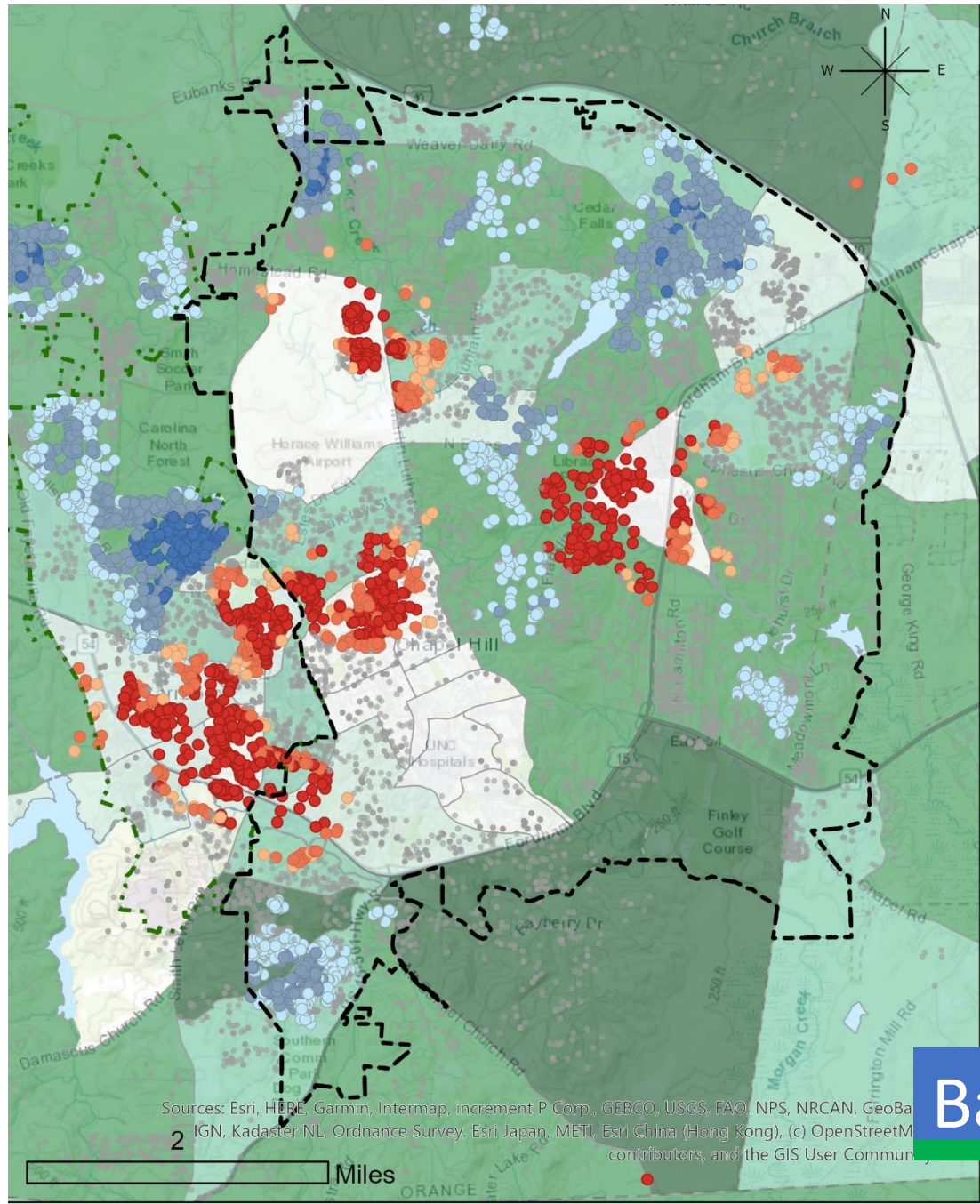
Whereas monetary fines present an economic barrier to access  
services;  
Whereas there is mounting evidence that indicates eliminating fines increases library card  
adoption and library usage;  
...create a barrier in public relations, and absorb valuable staff time

2018-2019 ALA CD# 38 (Rev. 1/27)

# Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequality. American Library Association

services”;  
Whereas in Economic Barriers to Information Access, Annual Report on Library  
Rights, ALA states “All library policies and procedures, particularly those involving  
other user charges, should be scrutinized for potential barriers to access;  
Whereas libraries will need to take determined and pragmatic action to dismantle practices of  
monetary fines  
libraries of all types are responsive to bodies, be they school districts, boards of  
trustees, college and university administration, or government entities and therefore need to  
to make the case to those bodies about eliminating fines; and  
...not serve the core mission of the modern library; now,

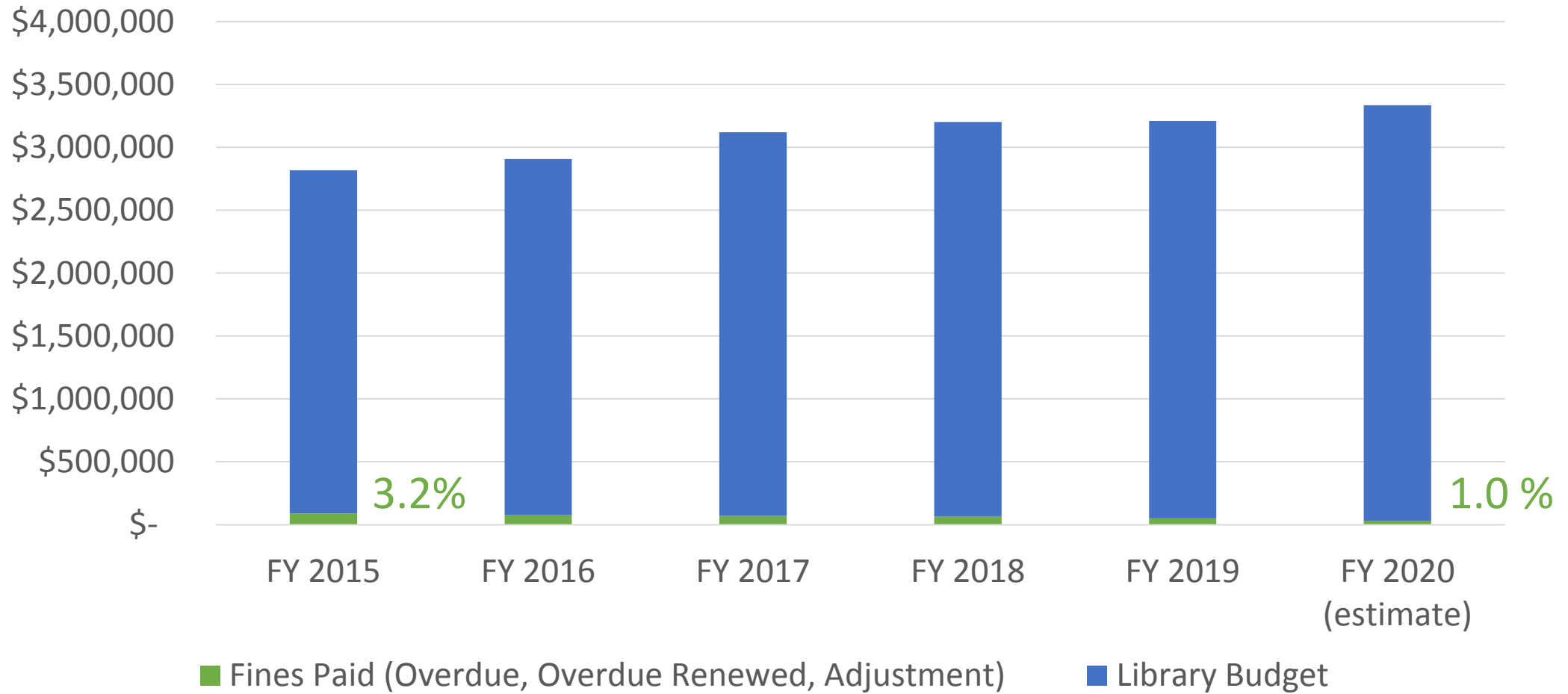
Social Equity



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoB  
 2 IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetM  
 contributors, and the GIS User Commu

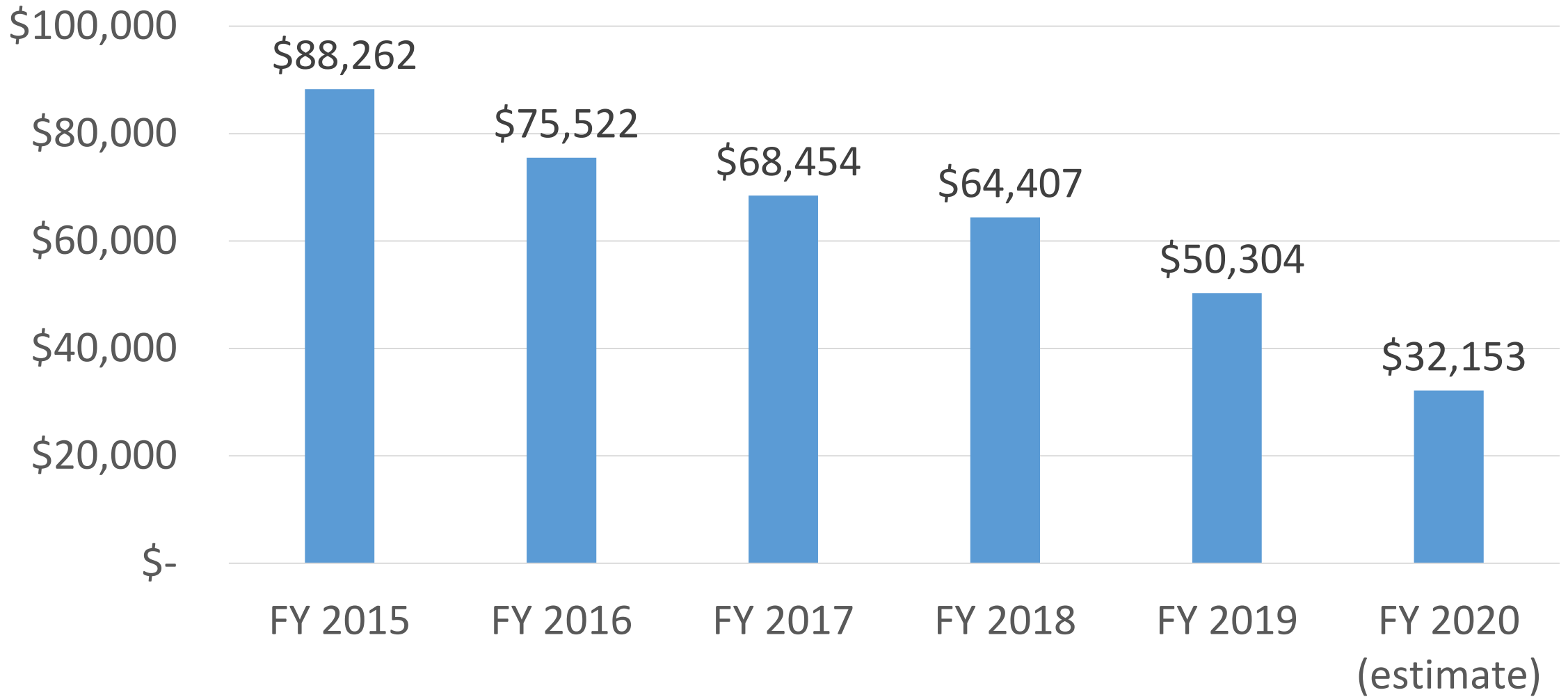
# Barrier to Access

# Overdue Fines as Portion of Operating Budget



Percentage of Budget

# Overdue Fines Collected



Decreasing Revenue

# Got a fine for overdue books? Philly libraries will soon forgive them

By [Aaron Moselle](#) · December 11, 2019

## LA Libraries Will Stop Charging Late Fees And Forgive Your Past-Due Sins

BY [RYAN FONSECA](#) IN [NEWS](#) ON [DECEMBER 13, 2019 12:30 PM](#)

WAKE COUNTY

## Got an overdue library book? Why Wake County won't fine you for being late

BY [ANNA JOHNSON](#)

JANUARY 04, 2020 04:37 PM



**Chicago Public Library became the largest system to eliminate late fees, a move that will increase access for low-income families. Will more libraries follow?**

National/Local Trend



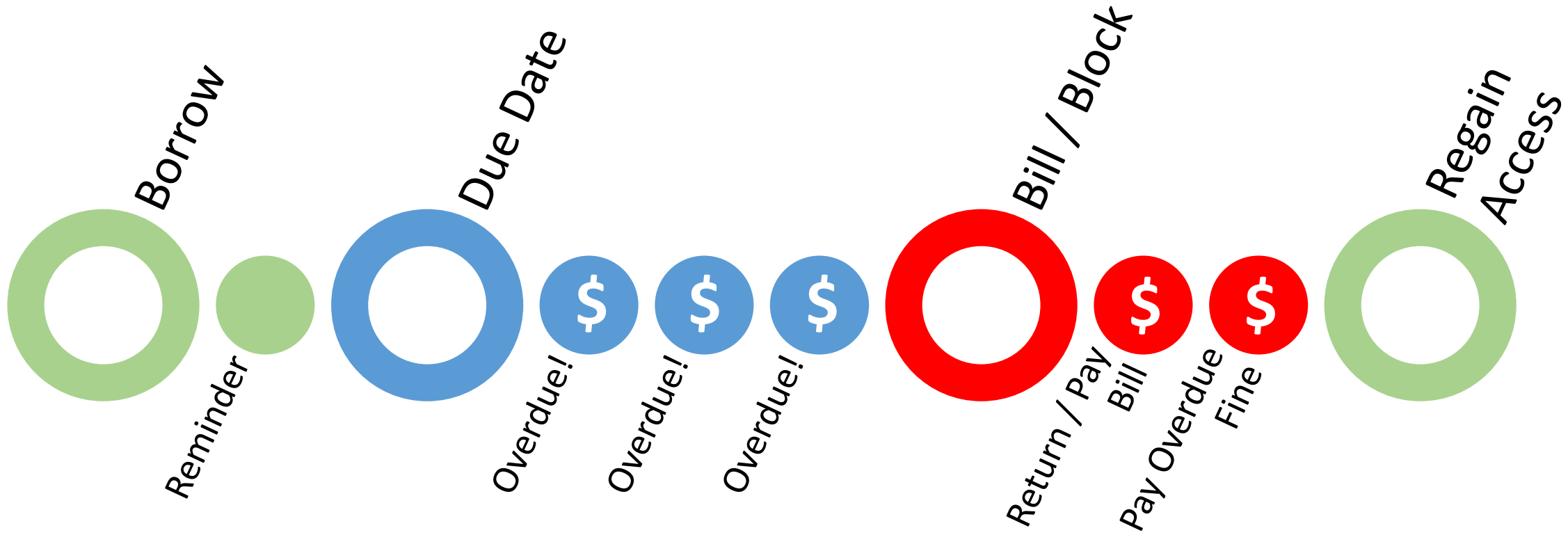
# Fine Free Libraries Map

[www.urbanlibraries.org/member-resources/fine-free-map](http://www.urbanlibraries.org/member-resources/fine-free-map)

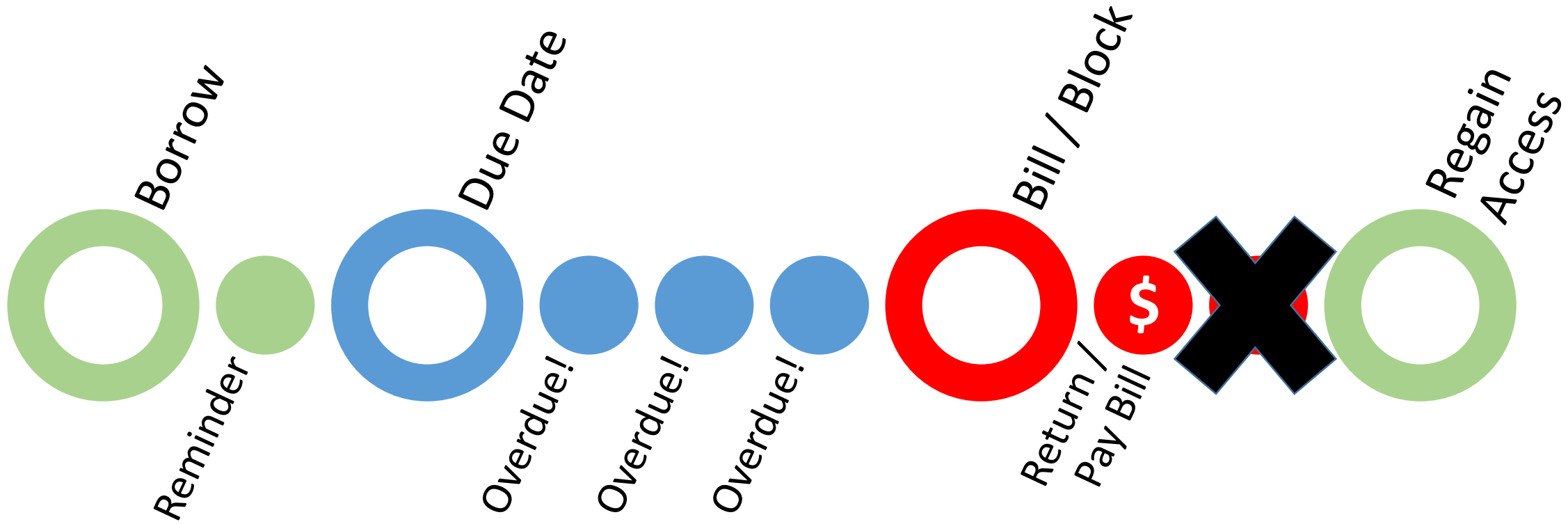


- **Lost library materials and lost library users returned**
- **Materials still come back**
- **Patrons are still responsible for materials they check out**
- **Library budgets not reduced**

- 1) Most library materials can be borrowed for 3 weeks**
- 2) We charge overdue late fines of \$0.25 per item / day**
- 3) People who have outstanding charges of \$25 or more are blocked from using their library card**
- 4) We bill people who damage or do not return items – and block their account until their bill is paid**



Current Library Procedure



Fine Free Procedure

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Total Patrons</b>	75,330
<b>Patrons who owe no money</b>	59,123
<b>Patrons who owe money</b>	16,207
<b>Median amount owed</b>	\$5.75
<b>Outstanding charges</b>	\$254,847

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# RECOMMENDATION

That the Council consider the Library Advisory Board's Petition and provide direction to staff regarding the Chapel Hill Public Library's Overdue Fine Policy.