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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rowan Public Library Goes Fine Free on May 25

Rowan County, NC – Something momentous is happening at Rowan Public Library today: As of 12:01 a.m. on May 25, RPL has eliminated overdue fines.

RPL is joining public libraries across the state and nation who have chosen to eliminate library fines. “While the rationale for imposing overdue fines, which is to ensure or encourage the timely return of materials so others may use them, may seem logical, it is not reality.” said Library Director Melissa Oleen in her presentation to the Library Board of Trustees. “North Carolina public libraries that have gone fine free in the last year report increases in circulation, book returns, long-lost book returns, library visits, and check-outs. Even the number of materials designated as ‘lost’ has decreased as return rates improve.”

As a director of a Rowan County department, Oleen looks for ways the library can yield the highest rate of return and best use resources provided through county funding. “Loaning physical materials is still one of the most sought-after services we offer. Going fine free is a significant way to maximize use of circulating collections,” she said.

Under the previous policy, a customer could be prevented from checking out items based on overdue fines owed on already returned items. These fines seem especially punitive for many juvenile users (ages 17 and under) as the fines may follow them into adulthood and bar them from checking out materials for years. Often, adults who cannot check out materials simply do not visit the library.

In these ways, overdue fines create an economic barrier impacting library use. Statistics show that overdue fines disproportionately affect low-income adults and families, seniors, at risk teens, teen parents, and adults with low literacy skills. It is not uncommon for Rowan families on a tight budget to make the decision to not sign children up for library cards or refuse

participation in library programs that involve the check-out of materials in order to avoid the risk of incurring the expense of overdue fines.

While the notion of a library without overdue fines may be surprising to some, RPL's digital library has always been fine free, with digital materials automatically returning themselves when the borrowing period ends. As of 12:01 a.m. on May 25, RPL's digital and circulating physical collections will now have matching, fine free policies.

The policy is not retroactive, and overdue fines accrued prior to May 25 are still owed if the materials have not yet been returned. The library recognizes that returning materials late is often due to circumstances beyond the account holders' control, such as home displacement, fire and water damage, or extended hospital stays.

A new procedure for requesting existing fines and fees be waived has been formalized. Waiver decisions will be made timely, consistently, and equitably, using the same criteria for each request. Borrowers interested in this option are encouraged to ask for a Fine/Fee Waiver Form at any RPL branch.

To learn more about Rowan Public Library, visit www.rowanpubliclibrary.org.

Images Attached: Fine Free social media graphic.

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